

Rolling On

By

Carmelo Gonzalez

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Be mailed to

Mr. Carmelo Gonzalez
418 West 17th Street Apartment. 2F
New York, N.Y. 10011

Rolling On / Carmelo Gonzalez

I.S.B.N. Number 0-9711273-0-1

Dedication

To my mother, Priscilla, and my sister, Carmen,
for raising me with care and love.

INTRODUCTION

Let me introduce myself.

My name is Carmelo Gonzalez and I'm a 33-year-old person with Cerebral Palsy. I developed this condition as a result of an early childhood illness. Cerebral Palsy is a form of brain damage that affects individuals differently. In my case, I have a speech impairment and limited control of my hands, which means that I often require assistance with eating and other basic functions. I am also unable to walk because of problems with balance and muscular weakness.

So I get around in a motorized wheelchair. I dine out, go to Broadway plays and movies, take long walks and go out dancing. You might wonder how I dance in a wheelchair. I do what everyone does – I move my body in rhythm to the music with another person, and when it comes time to spin around, I hit the controls on my power wheelchair and make a full rotation. Sometimes I let my partner sit on my lap and take a spin with me.

I live in New York City Housing and have done so for about twelve years now. I moved in several months after graduating from Frances Lewis High School in 1988. This was when I became more independent. Still, I rely on Personal Care Attendants for my daily functioning. I employ several attendants to care for me around the clock. I require their assistance to bathe, dress, cook, clean, and accompany me outdoors. While I couldn't live without them, I sometimes find it very draining that I don't have a lot of time to myself.

As a child, I always dreamed of being an actor. One of my oldest fantasies was to be on television. But I didn't believe I could realize this dream. I never saw disabled people on television, and my speech impairment makes it difficult for people to understand me. But as an adult, I found an acting school called The National Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped. I studied at this school for seven years. I acted in plays and short films. I also appeared in a "60 Minutes" profile of the school. So I succeeded in fulfilling my dream of being on television after all.

But I ultimately left the world of acting, because it became increasingly clear that my speech impairment made it impossible for me to get significant and consistent roles. So I became a writer instead.

My experience of being disabled has given me a unique perspective on life. It means I have to plan carefully for basic everyday activities. It means I don't take for granted simple pleasures like eating with friends in a restaurant without my attendant. I have to worry about accessibility and ordering food I can manage to eat on my own. It also means I have no desire to use drugs or alcohol or to introduce into my life the problems they cause. My life has enough difficulties already.

I also can't enter into romantic relationships with the ease that other people can. I have a hard time attracting a mate because many people don't see a disabled person as an equal partner. Even when I have a prospect, there are difficulties. My home attendants are always around, so it's hard to get time alone with that person. Although I could ask my attendants to stay home, I feel a certain responsibility to keep them fully employed.

I had been keeping a secret that I'm gay from my family since I was eleven years old. I finally told them on December 26, 1991. At first it was hard for my mother to accept it, but she's all right with it now.

Thank You

We met when I was young.
We met on unfortunate terms.
You were there when no one else was.
You saw me in a situation that no one ever saw me in.
You were there to carry me through.
Even when I would curse at you.
There were times that I wished I had never met you.
There were times that I didn't know where I would be without you.
You helped me play.
When I saw danger you moved me away.
You helped me see things that only you can.
Without each other we are nothing.
When we are together we become one.
I want to say thank you wheelchair for all you have done.

CHAPTER 1

I was born in Lutheran hospital in Brooklyn, New York, on March 13, 1968, into a family that wasn't ready for a disabled child. I had two older sisters Miriam and Carmen, and one older brother Nelson. My father was in jail when my mother went into labor. During birth there were a few complications, but the doctor told my mother that I was going to be okay. He told my mother that he wanted to keep me in the hospital for observation. After a few weeks the doctor gave the okay for my mother to take me home. While I was in the hospital my father was released from prison. My parents had everything ready for me. They had my room all set up. It had everything that a baby would need. A crib, closets, diapers and all kinds of stuffed animals.

Everything was fine when I went home. I was walking and talking like any other baby until I was two years old. That's when I got sick. My mother and father were going out, so they left a good friend of the family watching us kids. My mother told her to keep an eye on me because I wasn't feeling well. This friend had invited some people over. She was getting high with them and she wasn't watching me. I got sicker and my fever got worse. When my parents came home they found me with a fever of a 103 degrees and my eyes had rolled back. Mother grabbed me and ran to Lutheran Hospital. When she got there I was almost dead. They grabbed me from my mother's arms and put me in ice cold water to try to bring down the fever. My father was with my mother in the waiting room. My mother was crying so he tried to calm her down. The doctor came and told my parents that they were trying to save my life, but they weren't sure that they could.

Mother grabbed the doctor by his coat and told him, "You have to save my son! Please, you have to."

"I'm going to try my best, but there is no guarantee that I can. If we are able to save him, he might have some brain damage," the doctor said.

"I don't care, I just want my son alive," mother said crying to the doctor.

A priest came in to tell my parents that he wanted to baptize me. They do this in cases like this as a precaution.

Two to three hours went by when the doctor came to my parents and told them, "Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez I have good news and bad news. Your son is alive, but he has Cerebral Palsy."

The doctor told her that I would have difficulty doing things and I may not be able to walk or talk correctly. They told my parents that they were going to admit me as a precaution. I was there for a month, and then my parents took me home.

My mother visited me every day to feed and take care of me. However, something happened and she wasn't able to come to see me for a few days. When she came she found me tied up, dirty, and bleeding from my nose.

The nurse came in and my mother asked her, "What the hell is going on? Why is my son tied up? Look, He's all dirty and he has blood coming out of his nose."

My mother untied me and was getting ready to pick me up when the nurse tried to stop her. I almost fell on the floor. Mother put me back in the crib, turned around and punched the nurse dead in the face.

My father was talking to the doctor about when they could take me home. My father came in the room as mother punched the nurse. He grabbed hold of my mother because she was about to kill the nurse. My mother and father took me home that day without the doctor's consent.

My father was using drugs and he used to treat my mother badly. When he got high on drugs, he used to beat on her, so my mother was going to leave him. One day when I was about four, she went to look for an apartment. She left us in the care of a family member. This member of the family was using drugs and she and her husband set my mother up. They put drugs all over the house and called the police. The police came and found us alone with drugs in the house. They took us away. They put my brother and two sisters in a home, and they put me in a hospital. They called my father. My father came and got my brother, my sisters, and me. When my father found out that my mother was looking for an apartment to leave him, he didn't like that she was going to leave him. So to get back at her, he took my brother and my sisters to live with him and he put me in a hospital under a different name so my mother wouldn't know where we were. I was in the hospital for three years, and since my mind was still developing, I have very little recollection of that time period.

While I was in the hospital, mother and father split up permanently. When they released me from the hospital, I went to live with my father. My mother did not know where I was until she hired a private investigator to find us kids. I was seven years old at the time, but I acted like a four-year-old. I was living with my father, my sisters Miriam and Carmen and my brother Nelson. I also lived with father's common-law wife Nancy. My father and Nancy had two children together; Nilsa and George Junior Nancy had a daughter from a previous relationship named Madilyn.

We lived in a second floor apartment on Rockaway Boulevard in Queens. It wasn't one of the best apartments you could have, but it was a roof over our heads. It had three bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, and two long hallways. One of the hallways was the entrance to the apartment. You had to walk up eighteen steps. When you got to the top, there was a door that led to the kitchen. At the right of the kitchen was the bathroom. Then you hit the living room. It had the basic things that a living room would have. From the living room you could see the other hallway. As you walked down it, you hit the first bedroom, and then the second bedroom, which was my brother Nelson's room. It had a door that led to my father's room. My father's room was the biggest bedroom out of the three bedrooms. My two older sisters, Carmen and Miriam, shared

the first bedroom with me. Miriam didn't want to stay in that room, so she slept in the living room.

I remember when I came home, my two older sisters Miriam and Carmen and my older brother Nelson used to play train with me. They would push my wheelchair around the house going "choo choo," in and out of the rooms. We also used to play Monopoly and sometimes with the Monopoly money we used to gamble. It was fun doing that with my brother and sisters. We had a lot of fun back then. Sometimes I wish I could turn back the time to those days.

When I came home I couldn't speak that well so it was hard for my family to understand me. I couldn't sit up straight in my wheelchair or feed myself. They had to do everything for me. Thinking about that now I realize how much of a burden I was on my family, especially Carmen. Carmen was the one who took care of me throughout my childhood. When my mother and father separated and I went to live with my father, Carmen watched me. When I went to live with my mother again, I was so used to Carmen taking care of me that I didn't want any one else to take care of me but her. After a while my sister Carmen was the only one who understood me because I was always with her. That year I started going to school at United Cerebral Palsy for a year. That's when I started to speak better and sit up in my wheelchair.

One day Carmen and one of her friends didn't have anything to do, so Carmen made me have sex with my stepsister Madilyn. I was about eight years old and Madilyn was about six years old. I didn't want to do it but she made us do it anyway. Carmen took all my clothes off and made me lay on top of Madilyn. I didn't know what I was doing. I really didn't know what was going on. All I knew was that I didn't want to be doing it. When Carmen and her friend had enough, it was over. Later, Carmen asked us if we wanted to do it again. Madeline said yes, but I said no. I couldn't speak well enough to explain how I felt, so I started to cry because that was the only way that they wouldn't make me do it again.

Carmen said, "Okay Carmelo! Stop crying, I'm not going to make you do it again."

I was so happy.

I remember one day one of my sister's friends was taking care of me. My sister had to do something, so she asked her friend to watch me for an hour or so. Her friend had to change my clothes because I spilled something on myself. When she took off my clothes she started to play with my penis, and I started to get hard. The next thing I knew she had taken her pants off and gotten on top of me. I don't remember how long it lasted. I didn't say anything because I didn't know that it was wrong. I just thought that was the way things were after what Carmen made me do with Madilyn.

My mother found out where we were living with my father. My father had custody of us kids, but my mother had visitation. Some weekends Nelson and I would go with my mother.

That year Nancy set my father up and got him arrested for possession of drugs. She also managed to get herself arrested. The court wanted to put my sisters and brothers into a home, and me back in the hospital. When Carmen heard that, she picked me up and ran out of the courtroom. They stopped her and got a hold of my mother. She came to fight to keep us. She won custody of us because she was our biological mother, but they didn't give her custody of Nilsa and Georgie, who were put up for adoption. That was the last time I ever saw them.

We continued to live with my mother in the same apartment that I was living in with my father and Nancy. Back then my brother Nelson and I used to have a lot of fun. We used to play

with these toy soldiers we had. I used to set them up around the living room as though they were at war and were ready to kill the bad guy. Guess who was the bad guy? Yep, it was me. Whenever the army men shot me, I felt every shot. You may ask how I felt it. Well Nelson used to use his fingers as bullets. He would make believe I got shot. To make sure I felt it, he would poke me hard.

Nelson made up these three super heroes called Congor, Thongor and Mongor. They were his fingers. You might be wondering what I mean by his fingers. You see, Congor was Nelson's first two fingers, and Thonger was the other two fingers on the right hand. Mongor was all five fingers on the left hand.

At first there was only Congor. He wasn't on my side. I don't think Nelson would like playing like that any more, because when I got a hold of his fingers, I used to grab them and try to break them. Whenever I got a chance to kill Congor, and that wasn't often, that is when Thongor and Mongor came to life. These games may sound strange, but we had a lot of fun playing them when we were little.

That reminds me of a day that we tricked Carmen. You see one day I was in Nelson's room and his door was locked because we were looking at Playboy magazines. Carmen called me to go to bed.

"Carmelo it's time to go to bed," she said.

"I don't want to go to bed now."

"You have to go to bed, but I have to do something for mom first. When I finish, you're going to bed," Carmen said as she was leaving.

"Go to bed, and when she leaves the room, I'll go and get you and bring you back here," Nelson said to me as Carmen left.

I went to bed. About five minutes later, Nelson came.

"Are you ready?" he asked me.

"Yes, but she is going to know that you came and got me when she comes back and doesn't see that I'm here."

"Not if I put these pillows under the covers to make it look like you are sleeping."

So he put the pillows under the covers and we went back to his room. It took Carmen about an hour to realize that I wasn't in bed.

She came in and said, "There you are! I went to make sure you were okay, and when I went to touch the bed I felt the pillow. I knew that Nelson came and got you and brought you back here."

"Come on, let me stay for a while longer, please."

So she let me stay. I miss those years when everyone got along. Those were the good old days.

After a year at United Cerebral Palsy, I was transferred to P.S. 118. It was a regular school that had special classes for physically disabled students. With the exception of United Cerebral Palsy, all the schools I attended were regular schools with special education classes. That is when I met my first teacher, Mr. Freedman, and my first best friend Fernando. He was Puerto Rican and was in a chair with Muscular Dystrophy (a condition caused by a genetic defect that affects the muscles and nerves, leading to muscle weakness and movement difficulties.)

There was one thing that I didn't like about Mr. Freedman – he never really taught me how to read. He always gave me math homework, but he hardly gave me any reading homework. It's partly my fault too, because I went along with him. I should have asked for some reading homework, but I was a kid and didn't know any better. I regret it now, because I still have problems reading and spelling to this day.

Fernando and I were such good friends that sometimes I would go to his house on the weekends. In school we always ate lunch together, and we were always joking around with each other. I remember one time he had a birthday party. I went and had the best time ever. Someone gave him a racecar set as a gift. We played with it until about one in the morning, when the party ended. I stayed over that night. They treated me like I was part of their family.

The next year it was my tenth birthday. I had a party. Fernando and some of my other friends came to my party. A lot of people came, including my Aunt Etta and my two cousins, Arnold and Elvin. Fernando gave me a stuffed rabbit that I had wanted. I loved that rabbit a lot; I used to sleep with it.

That year there was a song called "Fernando." I used to love that song. I used to play it every day. Everybody got sick of it in my house. They used to tell me to turn that dumb song off.

That Christmas, my cousin Arnold came over. We got fire trucks as gifts. The next morning, Arnold and I got up early, about 7:00 o'clock in the morning. We were playing with our trucks, and we got tired of making believe that there was a fire. We wanted to put out a real fire.

Arnold said, "Hey, let's get some paper and make a fire, so we could put it out like the real firemen do."

So we started to burn some papers. One paper fell in the garbage and the garbage went up in flames.

"OH MY GOD! Get water to put out the fire!" I said.

We put the fire out. The kitchen was all black from the smoke. We didn't know what to do. We were scared of what my mother would do to us when she found out. We grabbed some rags and started to try to clean the mess before my mother woke up and killed us. We didn't make it. My mother smelled the smoke and came into the kitchen. She saw us on the floor trying to clean it up. We were all black from the smoke.

"What the hell are you two doing?" my mother asked.

We looked up at her with our two black faces and said, "We were playing firemen and we needed a fire so we could put it out."

My mother tried to hold it in, but she started to laugh because we had the saddest look on our faces. She couldn't hold it in any longer; she had to laugh. She told us to go and take a bath. We never did that again, but we used to do other things that were just as bad.

The next year a new kid came into my class. About two months went by when Fernando and I had a fight over nothing. You see, one of the other kids was picking on him. I tried to stick up for him, but he didn't want me to.

He said to me, "I don't need your help! Shut the fuck up!"

"You shut the fuck up!" I said.

Then we started to fight. Mr. Freedman came in the room and saw us fighting. He broke it up. When I got home my mother told me that Fernando's mother called her and told her that I had a fight with him and I scratched him in the eye.

I said, "He started with me. I was trying to stick up for him."

"I don't care who started it. I want you to call him and apologize to him," she said. She made me call him to apologize, so I did and we went back to being friends.

In the middle of the next year the whole Special Education unit moved to P.S. 223. My friendship with Fernando started to end. By going to the new school we had new kids in the class. I started to have black friends that year. My second best friend was Nicholas. He was black, and so was my third best friend Derek. Nicholas and I hit it off quickly. Derek and I became friends later on in life, a lot later in life.

Everybody used to make fun of each other. They picked on Fernando the most. They liked to push Fernando's arm off the table when he had his hand under his chin, so his head would hit the table. He would try to get back at them, but he couldn't because he was too slow. Fernando graduated that year and I never saw him again. I found out from a friend that he died the summer of 1987 from Muscular Dystrophy.

The next year new kids came to our class. There was one guy named Ben. You could say that he took Fernando's place. He had Muscular Dystrophy too, but he was weaker than Fernando. We all picked on him. I picked on him because I didn't want them to pick on me, but that didn't work, I still got picked on anyway.

To keep Carmen out of trouble my mother made her take care of me after school. Carmen had to take me everywhere she went. Carmen liked to go to school 226 to play handball. We went there almost all the time. We used to hang out there with Irene (Carmen's friend, who later became my sister-in-law) and her friends.

One day Carmen met a guy named Louis while playing handball. He became her boyfriend. I was about eleven and a half at the time. One Halloween Louis asked us to go to a Halloween party that he was having at his house, so we went. That was when I met my first girlfriend Martha.

You see Louis had three sisters. They came up to me and started to talk to me.

One of them said, "I'm Greeneyes, this is Martha, and this is our younger sister Lucy. What's your name?"

"My name is Carmelo."

"How old are you?" Martha asked me.

"I'm eleven! How old are you?" I asked.

Greeneyes said, "I'm thirteen, Martha is nine and Lucy is seven."

"I'm going to be ten in December," Martha said as soon as Greeneyes stopped talking.

Out of the three girls, Martha was the prettiest. She had long black hair and the prettiest big brown eyes I had ever seen. That night I was having fun talking and playing with Louis's three sisters, not knowing that Martha liked me. We were there until about one in the morning. I saw Martha talking to Carmen. I didn't think anything of it. As we were leaving Martha came up to me.

"When are you going to come again?" she asked.

"I don't know, whenever Carmen comes."

"We might come tomorrow," Carmen told Martha.

"So I might see you tomorrow, Carmelo, Okay!" said Martha.

The next day Carmen asked me. "Carmelo?"

“What!”

“Do you remember Martha, Louis’s sister?” Carmen asked.

“Yes! Why?”

“Do you like her?” she asked me.

“Yes, I think she is very pretty. Why are you asking me all these questions about her?”

“Because she likes you and she wants to know if you want to be her boyfriend.”

“WHAT? She told you that?”

“Yes that’s what she told me. Do you like her?”

“Yeah! But I never thought that she’d like me,” I said with a big smile on my face.

We went to Martha’s after I got home from school. As I was going into Martha’s house, she came up to me.

“Hello, how are you?” I asked Martha.

“I’m okay,” she said.

Louis called Carmen to go down stairs.

“I’ll be downstairs if you need me. Tell Martha to get me, okay?” she said as she left.

Martha and I were alone.

“Do you want to listen to music?” she asked me.

“Yeah why not,” I said.

She put on some records. There are two songs that will always remind me of those days – “Heaven on the Seventh Floor” and “Native New Yorker.” She would always put them on when I was there. Martha’s oldest sister came in the room.

“Hi! You must be Carmelo? I’m Mary,” she said.

“Yes.”

“I’ve heard a lot about you.”

“Shut up, Mary,” Martha said, cutting Mary off.

“I’m just talking to him,” Mary said with a smile on her face.

“Mom’s calling, you Mary.” Martha said.

“Okay I’m going! I’ll see you later Carmelo. It’s nice to meet you. Don’t do anything that I wouldn’t do,” Mary said laughing as she left.

I just smiled.

Carmen and I used to go there almost every day. Carmen would leave me with Martha and she would go out with Louis. Martha and I would go upstairs. When we would go upstairs, we used to like to race up and down the stairs sitting down on the steps. She would always win going up but I always won going down. Sometimes she would win by running down. We liked to play house. She would be the mother and I would be the father. We would even have children. Her little sister Lucy and her brother Kojack would be our kids. My favorite part of the game was bedtime. Martha and I would lie down next to each other. We would only kiss. What do you expect? We were only ten and nine years old in the Seventies.

The funny thing was my family was dating her family. I was going out with Martha. Carmen was going out with her brother Louis. My brother Nelson was going out with Martha’s oldest sister Mary, and my oldest sister Miriam was going out with Martha’s other brother named Nelson. Irene was going out with one of Martha’s cousins, and Carla (Irene’s sister) went with one of the other cousins named Victor.

Martha and I always got along well. We only got into one argument and broke up. It lasted for just five minutes. You see I got mad at her for something stupid. I don't even remember what it was about. Anyway I told her that I wanted everything I gave her back, so she gave me everything. Believe me, I gave her a lot of stuff. Like stuffed animals, bracelets, necklaces, cards and other stuff. As I was going out of the room, I realized that I couldn't go far, because I used to crawl on the floor to get around the house when I was upstairs. I couldn't get anywhere carrying the stuff and trying to crawl at the same time. I turned back and told her that I was sorry and I gave her the stuff back. She took the stuff back and we kissed and made up.

Everything was back to normal until Carmen told me that someone told her that this boy name Boobie was trying to go after Martha. I was so angry.

I went up to him and asked him, "Is your name Boobie?"

"Yes."

"You're the one that likes Martha?" I asked him.

He said yes, so I punched him in the face and said, "If I ever see your fucking ass anyway near my girl again I swear I will kick your mother-fucking ass. Don't think that I can't!"

Then I went to Martha and told her, "I just met the boy that likes you."

"What boy? What are you talking about?"

"Some boy named Boobie."

"I don't like him. You're the one I love." Then she asked me for a kiss.

Everything was okay for about six months. Then Carmen and Louis had an argument. Louis's family didn't want Carmen there, but I was welcome to see Martha. Carmen took me there a few times. When Carmen wanted to hang out with her friends, I had to go with her. I couldn't stay with Martha that much, so we just stopped seeing each other.

That year my father came out of jail on probation. He went back to selling drugs again. My father used to sell drugs for a living. It wasn't right for my father to sell drugs when I was with him, but he did. While with him he made me hold the drugs and the money so he would be clean if the police searched him.

He always told me joking around, "Here Carmelo hold this, and if a cop comes to search you just act like you are crazy. Shake your head and make weird sounds."

I never had to do that. You may be wondering how a man could do that to his son. To me it was a way of life. My mother didn't know that my father was doing that, because if she had known she wouldn't have let my father take me. It didn't bother me. I liked having all that money on me, and I liked being around my father. In fact, I'm glad I had to deal with drugs early in my life. It made me see what drugs do to people and I didn't want to be one of those people.

Father had a lot of women, but I didn't like them at all. They never mistreated me, but I didn't like them because they were always high on drugs. They looked . . . I don't know how to explain it. I would look at them as they sat on the sofa nodding from the drugs. It looked like they were about to fall flat on their face, but they never did. Have you ever noticed that people who do certain drugs and start to nod look like they are going to fall, but they never do. Why is that? Also I didn't like how they would treat my father. They would always yell at him and fight with him all the time in front of me.

That 4th of July my father asked my mother if he could have Carmen and me for the day. We went with him. When it got dark outside I asked my father.

“What are we going to do now dad?”

“Wait here and I’ll be right down.”

So he went up where he lives and came back down with some bags.

“What’s that dad?” I asked my father.

He gave the bags to Carmen to open. She opened it and said, “Look Carmelo, it’s a bunch of fireworks!”

That night we went crazy setting them off.

That year my father opened a store. He had my brother Nelson running the store. My father used to take me there to check up on the store. I liked when my father would take me there, because I was able to get all the candy I wanted. As I write, the vision of those days comes to mind.

When my father had me with him and we were around his friends, his friends would tell me how much my father would talk about me. When I was around his friends, I had it made. They would get me whatever I wanted.

That year Carla and Victor had a daughter out of wedlock. They named her Elizabeth. I was eleven at the time. Carla was still living with her parents. Carla asked me if I wanted to hold Elizabeth. That was the first time I held a baby in my arms. I couldn’t believe that Carla had enough trust in me to let me hold her. Carla took a picture of me holding Elizabeth. I feel that still to this day Elizabeth and I have a special bond. Carmen and I loved going to visit Irene and Carla’s house. One of the reasons that I liked going to their house was because I loved holding Elizabeth, but that wasn’t the only reason that I liked going there. I also liked going there because I had a little crush on Carla. I would go crazy inside whenever I saw her. I guess it was because every time I saw her she would give me a kiss on my lips. Yes, Martha kissed me on the lips before, but by that time I wasn’t seeing her and Carla was older.

Carmen made friends with a girl named Jackie and her sister Jennifer. We used to spend a lot of time at their house. Their father played dominoes with us. Sometimes we would stay over night. I would take a bath with Jordan (Jackie’s little brother).

One day Jordan and I were taking a bath and we became curious about our bodies, like kids our age do. I was about eleven, and he was about nine years old. We started to touch each other’s bodies. We didn’t know that what we were doing was wrong. This went on almost every time we took a bath together and they left us alone. We always liked to take a bath together. I never thought that something as simple as taking a bath with someone of the same sex would change my life. That was my first homosexual experience. I knew that I was supposed to like girls, but I was also attracted to boys. I didn’t know that there was a title or name for what I felt because I was only eleven years old at the time.

We continued to do it throughout the years. We almost got caught a few times. In our teen years Jordan and I spent a night over his sister’s house. We had to sleep in the living room on separate couches. We thought that everyone was asleep so we started to fool around. He came over to the couch that I was sleeping on, and we got undressed. We were playing with each other when we heard someone coming towards the living room. Jordan jumped up, put on his pants and went back to his couch just as his sister walked in. Another time we were at my house when my mother said that she had to go out to run an errand. When she left I asked Jordan if he wanted to fool around and he agreed. We took off our pants and got into bed and started to jerk each other

off and have oral sex. All of a sudden we heard my mother's voice. Jordan jumped up, grabbed his pants and put them on. I couldn't move that fast so I just grabbed the sheets and covered myself. My mother came into the room and noticed that I was covered and that I was shaking.

"What's wrong Carmelo? Why are you covered?"

"Nothing Mom, I'm just cold."

"It's not cold in here. Are you getting sick?" She touched my forehead to see if I felt warm.

"No, I'm fine mom."

I pulled the sheets under my armpits and put my arms down to hold the sheets, because I thought that my mother was going to pull the sheets off.

"Why are you back so soon?" I asked my mother.

"I forgot the money."

When she left I got dressed, and Jordan left. We were always afraid of people finding out about us, but luckily no one ever found out what was going on.

One day Carmen got angry with me because I accidentally got her in trouble. When Carmen and I would hang out with her friends we would come home late, I would fall asleep on the bus on the way to school. I was able to wake up when we got to school, but one day I didn't get up in time. The teacher called my mother and told her. My mother got mad at Carmen and told Carmen that we had to be home no later than ten o'clock. Carmen got mad at me and said, "I'm sick of taking care of you. I can't do anything without taking you with me. You don't want anyone else to take care of you. I don't have any time for myself." I felt so bad.

The next day I tried to kill myself, but I didn't make it. You see everybody went out and I was alone. All that I was thinking about is what Carmen told me the night before. I went to the kitchen and grabbed a knife to try to stab myself. As I was going to stab myself, Carmen walked in and saw what I was going to do. She grabbed the knife from my hands.

"What are you doing?" She said.

"Everybody hates me. I'm always in the way. That's why no one wants to take care of me," I said crying.

"I'm sorry for what I said last night, I was just mad at you because Mom got on my case. I didn't mean it."

The reason that I didn't want anyone to take care of me is because one-time my other sister Miriam took care of me. I did something she didn't like and she hit me on the elbow with the heel of a shoe four times. My mother heard me crying and came out of her room. She saw Miriam with the shoe, and came in the room and yelled.

"What the fuck are you doing?" She took the shoe from Miriam and hit Miriam with the same shoe fifteen times. "If I ever see you hitting Carmelo again I will kill you. Do you hear me Miriam?" my mother said, pushing her out of the room.

Ever since that happened Miriam and I didn't get along that well. We can't be alone too long without fighting. I'm not saying that we never got along. When she was sixteen years old, she moved out of the house, but she would come over to the house to visit. Sometimes when she came we would put on a show with the song "Copa Cabana." I loved when we did that; it was so much fun.

Another time she came over and she brought her dog with her to the house. I was playing ball with him and I went to get the ball from him. I grabbed him the wrong way and he bit me right on the eyebrow. I didn't realize that he had bit me until I saw blood coming down my face. My mother started to scream. She grabbed me and took me to the emergency room. The doctor gave me two stitches on my eyebrow. I didn't get any shots because the dog had his shots, so it wasn't necessary. The doctor told my mother that I would have to stay home for two days. I was upset because I wanted to go to school. The next day was picture day at school. I missed it, but the next week they had another shooting. I took the picture with a patch on my eye. The patch didn't cover my whole eye, just my eyebrow. The next week I went to the doctor to get my stitches taken out. I still have a scar to remind me of that day.

About a month after that, the school had a candy sale. I had to go door to door to try to sell as much as I could. I went door to door for about a week and a half. I sold about \$150 worth of candy. Carmen and I kept the money. I spent my half of the money on toys and pinball games. Downstairs from where I was living there was a club called Bennies. We would go there to play pinball and pool. I loved playing pinball the most. I would spend all my allowance on pinball and cookies. I would play it for hours.

One day while I was playing in the club two guys came in. They watched me play and one of them said, "You are good."

"Thank you! My name is Carmelo. What's yours?"

"I'm Bob, and this is Bill."

"Do you want to play?" I asked.

"No! We have to go, but here's two dollars. Have fun."

"Thank you," I said.

Whenever I went there people would give me money to play the pinball game. I would put on a sad face, so people would give me money. I would get black and blue marks on my legs from playing pinball. I would stand up and lean on the table and bang my legs against it while I was playing.

My mother met Ralph in Bennie's. He's my stepfather. She dated him for a month or two before she brought him to the house to meet us. She would stay at his house sometimes. I remember once she went to stay with him at his place for the night, and that night we had a blackout. I was home with Carmen and she didn't want to stay home. We went out and met up with Irene and some of Carmen's other friends. We stayed out late that night.

When Carmen and I went out, kids would look at me and laugh. Carmen would get mad and go up to them and smack them. Sometimes she brought them over to me so I could smack them myself to teach them not to laugh at people who were in a wheelchair. It would make me feel bad when kids laughed at me. I would wish that I wasn't disabled.

That reminds me of a day Carmen and I went to play handball. While Carmen was playing a game, I was riding around in my chair. I saw this black girl with glasses. She was staring at me like I came from another planet. I didn't like people staring at me. I still don't, but I've gotten used to it.

I asked her, "What the fuck are you looking at?"

She kept on looking at me. By the third time I asked her what she was looking at, I got so mad that I went up to her and grabbed her glasses from her face and threw them on the ground.

Then I grabbed her by her hair and punched her in the face three times. She went crying to her brother.

Her brother approached Carmen and asked, "Why did your brother hit my sister?"

"Because she was staring at him. He asked her to stop staring at him, but she didn't, so he got mad," Carmen said.

He told his sister not to stare at people because it's not nice, and he told her to apologize.

The next day when I went to school I had a fight with Derek. You see, after lunch we would have recess. We would play knock-hockey. That is a game that has a table board and a puck. You have to hit the puck into a hole on the other side of the table. Nicholas and Michael were playing. Whoever won would play the next player. Derek and I were next, but we both wanted to go first. When Nicholas and Michael finished playing, Derek and I grabbed the hockey stick at the same time.

I said, "Let go of the stick!"

"NO! You let go!" Derek said.

"Let go of the fucking stick!"

"Fuck you! I'm not letting shit go."

So I punched him in the arm. He grabbed the hockey stick and swung it at me. He almost hit me in the face, but I picked my arm up and blocked it. Mr. Freedman came in the room and saw us fighting. He started to yell.

"What are you doing?" He broke up the fight, and asked, "Who started it?"

"Carmelo started it, I had the next game. Carmelo grabbed the stick and punched me," Derek said.

"Stop lying! You are the one who started with me," I said.

"I don't want to hear it. If you and Derek don't know how to play, no one is going to play for a week. Now everybody get back to your desk," Mr. Freedman said.

There were two aides who would help us take off our coats, go to the bathroom and things like that. Their names were Doris and Debbie. Doris was a little nuts, but nice. Debbie I didn't like that much, and she didn't like me either. I would always call her names. One day Derek brought some cars to school. We were playing with them when I dropped one.

Derek got angry and said, "Why the fuck did you drop my car? It cracked."

He didn't want me to touch them, so I got mad and grabbed one. Debbie said to me, "Give the car back to Derek."

"Fuck you! I'm not giving shit back!" I said.

She grabbed my hand to take the car from me.

"Let go of my hand, BITCH!" I said.

She squeezed my hand hard to try to make me let go of the car. I got mad and bit her on her hand. She was going to hit me when I threw the car at her. She called my mother, but Carmen answered the phone. Carmen told her that she was going to take care of it. When I got home Carmen asked me what had happened. I told her why I bit Debbie. Carmen told me that she wasn't going to tell mother, and to never do that again because the next time she may not be home to save my butt.

There was an old lady name Ms. Tomson, who was a substitute teacher. She would come in when Mr. Freedman had to step out for a minute. When she watched us, we gave her a hard

time. We called her every name in the book. I didn't like doing it, but I had to. I didn't want to look like her pet and have the other kids pick on me. Ms. Tomson knew I didn't like picking on her and calling her names. When we were alone I was nice to her. Every now and then she used to bring me candy. Before the year had ended Mr. Freedman told us that she had passed away. We all felt bad about it.

About two weeks had passed when Derek started with me. He started making fun of my sister Carmen, so we had another fight. What happened was I missed the bus, so Carmen had to take me to school. After she left, Derek started saying that she looked like a dog. Mr. Freedman had left the room for a minute. I told Derek to shut up. He kept on saying things about Carmen, so I grabbed one of my brake poles from my chair and tried to hit him with it. When I swung at him, he grabbed the brake pole from me. That's when Derek punched me on my leg, and we started fighting. While we were fighting, Kim went to the door to watch out for Mr. Freedman.

When she saw Mr. Freedman coming she said, "Hey guys! Stop fighting, Mr. Freedman is coming." We stopped fighting just before he came in.

When he came in he said, "What was going on? I know something was going on. I heard noise coming from this room, and when I came in, it stopped."

"There was nothing going on," we answered. We went back to our desks and back to our work.

My cousin Arnold came to spend the summer with us. I loved when he stayed with us. Back then we were more like brothers than cousins. We would have lots of fun doing all kinds of crazy things. There was a store name Beer & Soda which was all they sold. Arnold and I would go in and steal sodas from there. We would go in the back where the sodas were and put about four sodas in between my back and the back of the wheelchair. As we walked out, we would say to the storeowner, "We forgot what our mother wanted, we'll be back." Carmen would see us laughing as we went to the park.

"Why are your two laughing?" Carmen asked us. Then we would show her the sodas.

"Where did you two get those sodas?" She asked us.

"We went in Beer & Soda and put them in the chair and walked out with them," Arnold told her.

We would always go and get soda whenever we went to the handball court. Sometimes we would buy one or two sodas so they wouldn't find out what we were up to. If we kept going in and out without buying anything, they would know something was up.

Another thing we liked doing was making the public phone ring to see who would answer it. We knew of a way to make the phone ring without anyone being on the line. That reminds me of an incident that happened one day when we were playing with the pay phones. We were playing with the phone and Carmen called us. Arnold grabbed the wheelchair and pushed it backward and let go of me. He tried to catch me, but he couldn't. The wheelchair spun around and tipped over. When the chair tipped over my mouth hit the ground hard and my tooth cracked. I started to cry, and blood was coming out of my mouth. Carmen started to yell at Arnold.

"Why did you let go of him?"

"I don't know. I didn't mean to make him fall," Arnold answered crying.

"What am I going to tell Mom? She's going to kill me when she sees Carmelo's mouth."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean it." Arnold said.

“It’s okay! I’ll think of something to tell Mom. Carmelo, try not to let Mom see your mouth until I think of something to tell her.”

I tried not to let my mother see my mouth, but no luck! When we got home, my mother went to kiss me and some blood came out of my mouth.

“What the hell happened? Open your mouth Carmelo, let me see your mouth.”

“He fell,” Carmen said scared to death.

“How the hell?”

“Arnold was pushing him backwards and the chair tipped over. He hit his mouth on the ground.”

“Get something so I can clean his mouth,” Mother said. My mother wiped the blood from my mouth. Arnold was scared that he was going to get in trouble, but he didn’t. Ever since that day, Arnold stopped pushing me backwards, but we still did other things that were crazy.

Two weeks after that Arnold’s brother Elvin came to stay with us. Carmen didn’t like the idea of having the three of us together. We used to drive her crazy. We would fight about everything and anything. One minute we would be playing and having fun, and the next we would be fighting.

That reminds me of one day we made Carmen want to kill us. Carmen took us to the movies. When Carmen went to the bathroom I had accidentally dropped some of Elvin’s popcorn, so Elvin started to throw popcorn at Arnold and me. Arnold and I threw the popcorn back at him. It was a sight. Popcorn was flying all over the place. When Carmen came back from the bathroom and saw what was going on her eyes almost popped out of her head. She started to yell.

“What the hell are you kids doing?”

“Elvin started to throw popcorn at us first,” I said as I was wiping the popcorn out of my hair.

“Carmelo did it! Carmelo did it!”

“I did not!”

“You started to throw popcorn at me first. You dropped popcorn on me,” Elvin said.

“I don’t know why you have to act like a baby,” Arnold said to Elvin.

“Fuck you!” Elvin said. He was going to punch Arnold but Carmen grabbed him.

“Stop it, or I will hit the three of you,” she said.

The usher came and told us to stop making so much noise or he was going to kick us out, so we stopped.

On the way home from the movies, four kids walked by us and Elvin heard one of them say, “Look at that boy in the chair.” They started laughing.

Elvin went up to them and asked them, “What are you laughing at?”

“We wasn’t laughing at anything,” they said.

“I heard you saying something about my cousin.”

One of them got smart and told Elvin, “What if we were laughing at him, what are you going to do?”

Elvin got mad and said, “Do you want to see what I will do?”

He punched the boy dead in the face. They started to fight. Another boy jumped in, so Arnold jumped into the fight. Carmen saw them fighting and went to break them up.

“What the hell is going on?” Carmen asked them.

“I heard them making fun of Carmelo, so I asked them what they were laughing at. That fat asshole got loud with me, so I punched him in the face.” Elvin said.

Elvin was getting ready to go after the boy again, but Carmen stopped him. Carmen hated when anybody would stare at me. Carmen went over to the boy, smacked him, and said, “You want to laugh, ha?” She smacked him again.

Then she brought the boy to me, and told me, “Carmelo, I want you to smack him.” So I smacked him.

“I don’t want to see you laughing at anybody in a chair again,” Carmen said as she let him go.

Summer ended and Arnold and Elvin went home. I didn’t want them to go, but they had to go back to school, and so did I.

That year Irene, Carmen, and Miriam had a big argument because Irene started dating my brother Nelson and they didn’t want her going out with him. They got into a big argument, and everyone got in involved. I’ll never forget that day. Everyone was hitting each other. Ralph got so nervous that he fainted. He landed right in front of me. I wanted to get out of there, but I couldn’t. My mother told Irene to get out and don’t come back ever. As Irene went down the stairs I went to the window to beg her not to leave. I didn’t want to stay and watch everyone fighting. I was so scared watching what was going on that I pissed on myself.

I missed Irene. Sometimes I would call her on the phone. One day while I was talking to her, my mother came in and asked me whom I was talking to. I told her that I was talking to Irene. I thought that she was going to get upset, but she didn’t. As time went by Irene and my family patched things up, so she continued to date Nelson. Nelson and Irene had two daughters, Crystal and Leila.

I was going on twelve when our landlady gave me a bag of stuffed animals and a big wheel. I used to drive Carmen crazy with the big wheel. I couldn’t keep my feet on the footrest, so Carmen would tie my feet on the footrest to keep them from falling off. Sometimes when we went out, I would go on the big wheel instead of my wheelchair.

That summer my mother had an accident in our house. One night she was coming up the stairs and there wasn’t any light in the stairway. The light switch wasn’t working. We had told the landlord to fix it, but he never did. My mother thought that she had reached the top step, but she hadn’t. There was one more step to go up. She missed and she fell all the way down the eighteen steps. She broke an arm and messed up her back.

She hired a lawyer so she could sue the landlord. When my mother told our landlord that she was suing him, he didn’t believe her. My mother told him that when he got the papers from her lawyer he would drop dead, and believe it or not when he got them he had a heart attack and died. His wife had to sell the building and we had to move.

Growing Up With The Pain

Growing up with the pain that people caused you.
You cry to me, but I don't hear you.
I wonder why there was no one there to hear your cries.
You learned to live with all those lies.
You thought that you had it under control,
But someone else came and showed you that you don't.
Once again you faced those feelings.
Now that you're older you can face the truth,
And no one can make you feel the abuse.

CHAPTER 2

That same year my doctor told my mother that I needed an operation on my legs to loosen the muscles so that I could stand straighter. They said that they would like to do it after my thirteenth birthday. They set the date for March 20, 1981, at the Hospital for Special Surgery if she could wait until I went in the hospital for us to move. It was just three weeks until I had to go for my operation. The landlady agreed.

The big day came. I was scared to go into the hospital. I didn't want to stay. They took me to the room that I was going to stay in. There were three other kids in the same room. My mother, Carmen, and Ralph, my stepfather, went with me.

"Isn't it a nice room?" My mother asked me.

"I don't like it. I don't like it here. I want to go home," I said. It was the first time that I was going to be away from home and away from Carmen. Carmen had become a surrogate mother to me since she was the one that always took care of me. The nurse came in and told my mother, Carmen, and Ralph that they had to leave.

My mother said, "We have to go now. Carmen and I will come tomorrow. You'll be okay."

"Yeah! You'll be okay! We'll see you tomorrow," Carmen said.

I was scared after they left, but I turned to the boy in the next bed and started to talk to him.

"Hi! My name is Carmelo, what's yours?" I asked him.

"My name is Mike, that's Tom, and over there is Jim." I said hi to them.

Mike asked, "Was that your family that was just here?"

"Yes! That was my mother, my sister and my stepfather."

"What are you going to have done?" Tom asked.

"They are going to loosen the muscles in my legs. That way I'll be able to stand up straight," I said.

"Is this your first operation?" Jim asked.

"Yes, How about you?" They all said yes. Then my phone rang. I had my own phone next to my bed. I answered it. It was my mother.

"Hello! Oh hi, Ma! I'm fine. I was just talking to the guys."

“Carmen and I will be there tomorrow, Okay?”

“Okay ma, I’ll see you tomorrow, love you.” I hung up and I went back to talking to the guys. At 9 o’clock the nurse came and told us that it was time for bed.

The next morning my mother and Carmen came. The doctor was showing my mother where they were going to operate.

The doctor said, “We are going to make four little cuts on him. One between both of his legs and one behind each knee.”

The nurse came and gave me a shot of anesthesia to put me to sleep. When I saw that big ass needle, I started to scream and fight with the nurse. My mother and Carmen had to hold me down. The nurse gave me the shot on my leg.

My mother said, “Don’t worry, everything is going to be okay.” The nurse came to take me to the operating room on a stretcher.

“Relax and don’t worry. Everything is going to be okay. Wait here, I’ll be right back,” she said.

When she left I told myself, “Don’t fall asleep! Don’t fall asleep! Don’t fall asle---
ZZZZZZZ!”

The next thing I knew, I woke up with a cast from my waist to my feet, and an IV in my arm.

“Hi, how do you feel?” Carmen asked.

Still half asleep I answered, “My legs feel funny. Where’s Mom?”

“Mom had to leave. She told me to tell you that she’s coming tomorrow morning and she loves you.” I fell back to sleep.

In the middle of the night, the nurse woke me to give me some medication.

“Carmelo, wake up. You’ve got to take your medication.”

“What is this?” I asked the nurse.

“It will help with the pain and help you fall asleep.”

“I was already asleep!” I said in a smart tone of voice. “Where’s my sister?” I asked her.

“She had to go. She said to tell you that they’ll be here in the morning. Go back to sleep.”

When she left I thought to myself, “I don’t understand. Why is she going to wake me up to give me something to make me sleep? They are crazy!”

That night was the longest night of my life. When I sleep I roll up into a ball, but that night I couldn’t. I tried to turn on my stomach. I tried, but I couldn’t. I got only halfway. It was so funny. My body was twisted like a pretzel with one leg up in the air. I called the nurse, but she didn’t respond. About two hours later she came to see what I wanted. I had fallen asleep and she woke me up saying, “What have you done?”

“I was calling you because I wanted to turn on my stomach. When you didn’t come, I tried to turn myself. Why didn’t you come?”

“I was doing something,” she said.

“You always say that you are doing something when I call. You probably didn’t want to get up and find out what I needed. If you hadn’t waken me up before, I would still be sleeping. I’m going to tell my mother what’s going on,” I told her.

That next day when Carmen came I told her what happened the night before.

“I can’t do anything about it,” Carmen said.

“I want to go home. I don’t like it here,” I said crying.

My mother would come to see me once in a while, but Carmen would come every day. When she came she would wash me because I didn’t like the nurses washing me. They would hurt me when they washed me between my legs where I got operated. I didn’t want Carmen to leave, so every time Carmen would leave I would act like a spoiled brat and throw a fit. The nurses saw how Carmen took care of me, so they told her that she could stay. Carmen asked my mother if she could take off from school to take care of me. My mother made the arrangements. They put a cot next to my bed so she could sleep next to me.

The Hospital had a classroom where the kids kept up with their schoolwork. They would lay me on a stretcher on my stomach (it had two big wheels in the front), so I could wheel myself around. Before Carmen would leave to get clean clothes I would make her put me on the stretcher so I could move around.

I was in the cast for a month. It was the longest month of my life. It would kill me when I had an itch on my leg that I couldn’t scratch. I hated when that happened.

When the time came to have my cast removed I thought that I would be happy, but I wasn’t. They took me in the room where they remove the cast. I saw that they use an electric saw to remove the cast. I looked at them and said, “Don’t come near me with that thing!” I wouldn’t let them near me with it. They had to get my mother and Carmen to calm me down. As they cut the cast, the vibration from the saw made me think that they were going to cut my leg. I started to scream, “You’re going to cut my leg!”

“Carmelo, don’t worry, they’re not going to cut you,” my mother said.

That night I couldn’t sleep at all. I was in so much pain because they used staples instead of stitches when they operated. They told me that they had to leave them in until the next day. I thought that night would never end. I couldn’t bend my legs. Every time I tried, I would scream. I thought getting the cast off would make me happy, but that night I was in so much pain that I thought I was going to die. The next day when they took the staples out, I was able to bend my legs and sit down in my chair again. It felt so good to be able to sit in a chair. The doctor told my mother that in a week they were going to send me upstate for rehabilitation. I would be there for a few months.

The day came when I had to go to the new hospital. My mother and Carmen went with me. It took about two and a half hours to get there. When we got there, a guy named Bill Atkins was waiting for me. He was my caseworker. He showed us the room where I was going to stay. He introduced me to one of my roommates. There were four guys in one room. Then he showed us around the place. It was nice. They had a room where you could go to listen to music, and they had a gameroom downstairs. That was what I liked the most. After they showed us around it was time for my mother and Carmen to leave. I didn’t want to stay there, so I started to cry.

My mother told me, “We have to go. You’ll be okay here.”

“I want Carmen to stay.”

“This is not like the other hospital. I can’t stay with you this time,” Carmen said.

One of the nurses came in and said to me, “Hi! You must be Carmelo? I’m Jane, but some of the kids here call me mom. You could call me mom if you want.”

“No thanks, I’ll call you Jane,” I said.

Then Bill came in and told my mother and Carmen that it was time for them to leave. My mother said, "Carmelo we have to go now."

"I don't want to stay here alone. I want Carmen to stay with me, please." I said.

"I can't stay. You will be all right here," Carmen said.

My mother told Carmen, "Let's go, he'll stop when we leave." It was hard for my mother to leave me crying.

Jane said to me, "Don't worry, you're going to like it here." At the time I didn't know that I would love it there, and when it was time for me to go home, I wouldn't want to.

I stopped crying and started to talk to one of my roommates. There was one guy in the room at the time.

"Hi, I'm Carmelo. What's your name?" I asked him.

"I'm Jerry, nice to meet you."

"How long have you been here?"

"About five years," he said.

"When are you going home?" I asked.

"I'm not. My parents can't take care of me."

"How is it here?"

"It's okay," he said.

Then Jane came in and said, "It's time to go to dinner, Carmelo." She grabbed Jerry, and I followed them. Jerry had Muscular Dystrophy and had to be lying on a stretcher. He had difficulty breathing. He had a hole in his throat to help him breathe, so he would whistle when he talked. After we had dinner, I went back to my room to put my things away. When I went back I met my other two roommates, Mike and Jack.

Jack came in and said, "Hi, I'm Jack. You must be the new guy." Jack was able to walk.

"Yes! I'm Carmelo."

Then Jane came in. "How are you getting along here, Carmelo?"

"I'm doing fine," I said.

"Good! If you need anything, let me know, okay?" she said. When she left, I said to Jack,

"She seems nice."

"Don't let that act fool you. She's not all that nice. She could be a bitch when she wants to."

"Okay! How long have you been here?" I asked.

"About seven months."

Then Mike, my other roommate, came wheeling into the room and said, "I'm Mike. What's your name?"

"I'm Carmelo."

"How do you like it here so far?" he asked me.

"It's okay," I said.

Then he asked Jack, "Yo Jack, do you want to go and play some pinball?"

"Is there a pinball game here?" I asked excitedly.

"Yeah! Do you want to come with us?" Jack asked me.

"Yeah! I would love to."

"Okay, I'll push you. Are you ready?" Jack said.

“Yes, let’s go. Are you coming, Jerry?” I asked.
Jerry said, “No, I’m going to stay and read.”
“Okay.”
As we were leaving, Jane came in and asked, “Where are you going?”
“We’re going to show Carmelo the game-room, if it’s okay with you,” Mike said.
“You know you have to be back up here by eight,” Jane said.
As we were walking away, Jack was saying, “Yes Jane, whatever you say Jane, kiss my ass Jane.”
“You’re sick, Jack! What if she heard you?” I asked laughing.
“I don’t care! What is she going to do? Nothing.” Jack said.
“Why do we have to be back by eight? Is that the time we have to go to sleep?” I asked them.
Jack said, “No, that’s the time the nurses change shifts.”
“So what time do we have to go to bed?” I asked Jack.
“Well, on the weekdays we have to be in our room at nine. On the weekends we can stay up until twelve.”
When we got downstairs to the game-room Mike asked me, “Are you any good?”
“Am I good? Of course I’m good. But are you any good?” I asked.
Mike turned to Jack and said, “He asked me if I’m good, can you believe that? Come on Carmelo, let’s see how good you are.”
“I’m going to beat you so bad, you’re going to wish you hadn’t asked me to play,” I said with a smirk on my face.
“Best two out of three. You go first, Carmelo.”
“Okay, you asked for it,” I said.
We played. Mike won the first game. Mike said, “I won. Are you sure you want to go on with this? I don’t want to see you cry.”
“You make me cry? Ha! In your dreams,” I said.
“I have an idea. How about making the game more interesting?” Jack said to us.
Mike said, “What do you mean by that?”
“How about the loser has to give the winner their dessert tomorrow?”
“I don’t like that idea,” Mike said.
“What? You chicken?” I said.
He laughed and said, “Okay! I’m going first.”
“Okay! Go ahead.” I said.
We played. I won that game and said, “I told you I would kick your butt.”
“We have one more game to play.” Mike said.
Jack said, “We have to put it off until another day.”
“Why?” we asked.
“Because it is time to go back upstairs.”
“You are lucky it’s time to go up,” Mike told me.
“Yeah right! You know I would have kicked your butt,” I told him.
“You only won by 200 points,” Mike said. We went up to our room. We were talking about the game when Jane came in.

“How did it go, Carmelo, did you have fun?” she asked.

“Yes! It was nice.” I started to laugh because Mike was making funny faces and moving his arms behind her back.

“What’s so funny?” she asked me as she turned around. Mike stopped as she turned.

“Nothing. I was thinking about something.” I said

“Okay! I just came in to say bye. I’m going home. I’ll see you Monday,” she said.

“Okay, bye!” I said. When she left I said to Mike, “You’re sick! You almost got caught.”

“I don’t care. What is she going to do to me? Nothing!”

“Mary came by asking for you. She told me to tell you to go to her room when you came in,” Jerry said to Mike.

Mike said, “Okay, I’m going right now. I’ll see you later, Carmelo.”

“Okay!” I said.

“I’ll be back, too.” Jack said.

“So Carmelo, how did it go?” Jerry asked me.

“It went great. I won one, and Mike won one. We have to play one game to break the tie,” I said to Jerry.

One of the night nurses came in and said, “Are you ready to put your pajamas on, Jerry?” Then she saw me and said, “You must be the new guy.”

“Yes, my name is Carmelo!”

“Hi! I’m Mary, nice meeting you. Do you need help changing?”

“No, I can do it myself, thanks. Do I have to change now?” I asked.

“No! I’m changing Jerry now because he needs help. You can wait until you’re ready to go to bed.”

“Okay! I’m going to walk around.” I went to the lounge-room to listen to music. I was there for a while wishing I was back home. Then I went back to my room to change. Mary came in and said, “Hi Carmelo, are you ready to change into your pajamas?”

“Yes!”

“Let me help you.” After that I ate a snack and went to bed.

The next morning they woke me up at seven o’clock. I wasn’t use to getting up that early. The nurse came into the room saying, “It’s time to get up now.”

“I don’t want to get up,” I said and put the pillow over my head.

He pulled the pillow up from over my head and said, “Come on, you have to get up and take your shower.”

I got up like a zombie and went to take my shower. After the shower I got dressed and went to have breakfast.

That day I felt more comfortable being there. I started to meet more kids. They were friendlier than the ones I had in school. I didn’t have to be competing with anyone to be the popular kid in the class. No one was teasing anyone, or laughing at what you couldn’t do. Everyone accepted you for who you were.

On Monday, my caseworker Bill came to me and said, “Hi Carmelo, how are you doing? How was your weekend?”

“I’m getting used to it here, it’s okay.”

“Come with me, I’ll show you where you go for your school studies,” Bill said.

After I came back from lunch a woman came up to me and asked me, “Are you Carmelo?”

“Yes,” I answered her.

“Hi! I’m Katie. I’m the physical therapist that’s going to be working with you. Come with me.” I used to go for therapy three times a week.

After school was over, we could do what we wanted. As I was going back to my room a girl that had an upper body cast walked into me.

“I’m sorry!” she said.

“It’s okay. My name is Carmelo, what’s yours?”

“I’m Lilly! Where are you heading to?”

“I’m going to my room,” I told her.

“I’m going that way. Let me give you a push,” she told me, because she saw that I was having trouble pushing myself.

“How long have you been here?” I asked.

“I came a month ago. I had a back operation.”

“Why? What happened?”

“I fell from a ladder, and I landed on my back. This is my room,” she said as we were passing it.

“Okay, I’ll push myself now. Thank you.”

“You can come by whenever you want,” she told me.

“Okay, I’ll see you later,” I told her as I was pushing myself to my room. As I was going to my room I saw this boy talking to himself and rocking back and forth. I went up to him to get a better look. As I got near him, I saw that he didn’t have any eyes.

Jane saw me going near him and told me, “Don’t get too close to him.”

Before I could ask why, I found out. He grabbed my hand and tried to bite me. I had to punch him to make him let go of me. “I told you don’t get too close to him.” Jane said.

“What happened to him?” I asked.

“He was born like that, but he knows more or less what’s going on around him. Watch out when you get close to him.” I said okay and went into my room.

That night after dinner Mike asked me, “Hey Carmelo, I’m going downstairs to the game-room. Do you want to come? We can break the tie.”

“No! Not right now, maybe later on, I’m going somewhere.”

“Okay, I’ll see you,” Mike said. We never did get the chance to break the tie. I went to Lilly’s room and knocked on the door.

“Come in! -- Hi Carmelo, what’s up?” Lilly asked me.

“I just thought I’d come by and see what you were doing.” Then her roommate came in. I said hello to her. Then Lilly introduced us.

“Hi Jill! This is Carmelo. Carmelo, this is Jill, my roommate.” We both said hi to each other, then we all started talking.

That week was a difficult week for me. Katie, my physical therapist, made me work hard on my legs, and I had to see the dentist. Everyone who was admitted to the hospital had to have a check up, so I had to get one. Believe me, I didn’t like it, not one bit. I had two cavities, and two

cracked teeth that I got playing with my cousin Arnold. It took them about an hour to do the work on me. They put a cap on the two teeth that were cracked and filled the two cavities.

Afterwards, I went downstairs to play some pinball. When I was going down I ran into Mike.

“Where are you going Mike?”

“I’m going to the wood shop.”

“What wood shop? There’s a wood shop here?” I asked Mike.

“Yeah! Do you want to come? Let’s go.” So I went. That’s when I met Fred, one of the counselors who work with us.

“Yo Fred! This is Carmelo. He came yesterday.”

“Hi Carmelo. My name is Fred. How do you like it here so far?” Fred asked me.

“It’s okay.”

“Yo Fred, I’m going to work on my box,” Mike said as he left. Then Fred asked me, “So Carmelo, what do you want to make?”

“I don’t know. I never worked with wood before.”

“Well, how about a box? I’ll help you do it, but you have to do most of the work.”

“Okay!” It took me about three weeks to complete it. The box was about 10” by 18”. I was so proud when it was done. I carved my name on the top of it and put a lock on it so I could lock it. I would go to the gift-shop that they had and steal some stuff. Not big stuff, just little things. Like playing cards, stickers that I put on my box, things like that. Some times when I go in my box now, I remember those days.

A month went by when my mother and Carmen came up to see me. Two days before they came, Katie loaned me a motorized chair for me to use to get around better on my own. When my mother and Carmen got there, I made my mother go crazy when she saw me in the chair.

“Look Ma! Look what I could do,” I said, going real fast and spinning around.

“Stop Carmelo, you’re going to hurt yourself,” my mother said. I stopped and showed them around the Hospital.

“So Carmelo, how’s it going? Do you like it here?” Carmen asked.

“Yeah, it’s okay. They have pinball games here, and I made a lot of friends, too.”

“So, Carmelo when did you get that chair?” my mother asked.

“They gave it to me the other day. It’s fun. I like it. What’s going on at home?”

“Well, we moved to a two-family house. Nelson and Irene live upstairs. Oh yeah, I almost forgot to tell you, Irene is going to have a baby,” Mother said.

“For real? How many months is she?” I was excited.

“She’s about two or three months. You will see when you come home. Bill told us that in about two weeks you could go home once a month for the weekend. You’ll have your own room. Right, Carmen?”

“Yeah, and it’s big, too. You have two windows that face the front of the house,” Carmen told me. They were there for a good two hours. I showed them around, and then it was time for them to go.

“So Carmelo, we have to get ready to go. It takes four hours for us to get home,” Mother told me.

“Okay Ma! When are you going to come to see me again?”

“We don’t know, Carmelo, but we’ll be back soon,” my mother and Carmen said.

About a month later they built a new unit for the kids who just go there on the weekdays. So they split everyone up. They put me in the children’s unit not knowing that one of them had the chickenpox. They asked my mother if I ever had them. My mother didn’t know if I had them while I was staying with my father. They told her that they were going to send me home just in case.

I ended up staying home for a month. I remember that I didn’t like being home. At first I liked it. When I got there I found out that we lived about three blocks from Martha’s house. I only saw her about four times. Everything was great; until a week went by when all hell broke loose. My mother used to drink back then. When she drank, she became a different person. That New Year’s Eve we had a party and everyone was drinking. Everyone ended up fighting. My mother and Ralph got into an argument. Nelson, Irene, and Carmen were living upstairs. I don’t remember what really happened, but what I do remember is watching mother and Ralph fighting from my room. When they used to fight, believe me it was like World War Three to me. They used to throw things and sometimes they would hit each other. I used to watch them and want to leave, but I couldn’t go anywhere. I would have to watch and hear the fight even if I didn’t want to. My mother has Epilepsy and she had an attack right in front of me. It used to scare me every time she would get them. I would think she was dying. I would go crazy inside because I didn’t want to be there, but I had to. I couldn’t just get up and walk out, so I had to stay there and watch. I didn’t mind them fighting as much when Carmen was home. I felt safer when Carmen was with me. When I was there alone I would wish I were back in the hospital. When the day came for me to go back to the hospital, I was happy as hell to get out of that nut house.

When I went back to the hospital, everything had changed. They had three kids in a room instead of four. They put me in a different room. They put me in a room with two new guys named Dan and Bobby. I went to see if I could find Jack and Mike. I went into Jerry’s room.

He said to me, “Hey Carmelo, you’re back!”

“Yeah! I’m happy to be back.”

“Are you nuts or what?” he asked.

“No, I’m not nuts! I’m just happy to be back. So where’s Mike and Jack? I’m looking for them.”

“Well Jack left last Thursday. He went home for good. Mike is probably down in the wood shop like always.”

“I’m going down to see Mike. I’ll see you later.” I was on my way down when I ran into Fred.

“Hey Carmelo! When did you get back?”

“About an hour ago!”

“You’re just in time for the contest.”

“What contest?”

“Every summer we have a contest. It starts in the beginning of July and ends at the end of August. We divide ourselves into four groups. The groups are named after states. For example, my group’s name is Mexico. We have races and different events. The group that wins goes out on a trip to an amusement park. If you’d like you can be in my group.”

“Okay, what do I have to do?”

“Come, I’ll show you.” So we went down.

“Hey Carmelo, you’re back! What have you been up to?” Mike asked.

“Not much. Jerry told me that Jack went home.”

“Yeah he left. He told me to tell you bye for him.”

“Mike! Carmelo is going to be on our team,” Fred told Mike.

“Yeah, Carmelo?”

“Yeah! He told me about it and asked me if I wanted to be in, and I said yes. Right Fred?” I said and looked at Fred.

“Right. Let’s get to work.” So we went to work on our banners. When wood shop class was over, Mike and I headed upstairs.

“Mike, go ahead, I’ll check you out later. I’m going to see if Lilly is in her room.”

“Yeah, Carmelo! You like Lilly, go for it.”

I told him to shut up as I left. I knocked on the door and she told me to go in. As I was going in I said, “Hey Lilly! What’s going on?”

“Carmelo, you’re back!”

“Yeah. Where’s Jill?”

“I don’t know, she’s somewhere around.”

“You let your hair grow. I like it. You look good with long hair,” I told her. As we were talking I thought to myself, “I can’t believe how good she looks.”

Then Jill came in the room and said, “Carmelo you’re back!” We started talking till it was time to go to bed.

Monday came and it was back to work on my legs. Katie came looking for me.

“Hi Carmelo! How you doing?”

“Okay,” I said as we were going to the physical therapy room. When we got there she introduced me to someone new on staff named Paula.

“This is Paula. She is a student and she’s going to be working with us for six weeks.”

“Hi!” I said as I shook her hand.

“Katie told me a lot about you. I’m looking forward to working with you.”

“Let’s get to work,” Katie said to me as she pushed me on to the mat.

They made me work hard three times a week. A month and a half went by. Katie gave me a leg brace that I had to put on when I went to bed. I hated it. It was like I was back in the cast again. It was almost the same as the cast. When I put it on, it was from my upper thigh all the way down to my feet. I had to put it on five days a week. I had a break on the weekends. Katie and Paul thought I might be able to use crutches. One day they had me try them. I tried them, but I wasn’t ready to walk on them yet. I couldn’t balance myself on them yet. That day I got upset that I wasn’t able to walk on them. I really wanted to use them.

“Don’t get upset Carmelo. It’s okay. You’re not ready to use them yet. We’re going to work on it,” Paula said to me as she took the crutches from me. Paula and I got so close that when the six weeks was up and she had to leave, she gave me her picture and her address. I never got a chance to write to her.

They had a section that was for the kids who went there on a daily basis. There was a girl who used to go there who couldn’t talk. She used to like me. I knew she liked me because she would wink at me whenever I looked at her. One day I was in the elevator with her. She stopped

the elevator and I asked her why she stopped the elevator. She started to pull up her blouse, so I knew that she wanted me to feel her. I started to feel her tits. When I squeezed her tits, something came out of them. Well, I think it was milk. All I know is that whatever it was it smelled. I stopped touching her and turned on the elevator. When the doors opened I told her that I'd see her later and went to wash my hands. Ever since that day whenever I saw her she wanted me to feel her. She would lift up her blouse and gesture to me to touch her. I never touched her again. I had my mind on things like the contest and I was interested in Lilly. The day I was leaving, my mother and I were coming out of the elevator. My mother told me that someone was trying to call me from the balcony. When I looked up it was the girl from the elevator. She had a card that she had made for me. She threw it down to me. It just said good-bye.

We worked hard getting ready for the contest, three days a week. The time flew by and it was the big day. We had all kinds of events to do, like wheelchair races, beanbag tossing, and other things like they have in the Special Olympics. When it was all over that day, we didn't know who won, because it was a tie and we had one more event to go. Each team had fifty balloons with a paper attached to it saying whoever finds this balloon please call the phone number below. It also had the group's name. We had to let the balloons go and wait to see how many people called. We waited and when the week was up they counted how many calls came in for each group.

My group came in second place. The second place winners get a pizza party. I had a lot of fun that day.

About two days after that Mike was going home. When someone is leaving they take him or her out for something to eat and a movie. They may bring a friend along. Mike asked me to go with him. We went to eat and went to see "Superman II." On the way home we both made believe that we were flying the van back to the hospital. Looking back it might have been a little silly to make believe that we were Superman, and that we were flying the van. We do crazy stuff when we are young, but to us it was fun.

One day I had finished using the bathroom and was in the process of pulling up my pants when one of my roommates Dan (who is a mute) was standing in the doorway watching me. At first I thought that he needed to use the bathroom, because while I was pulling up my pants he entered the stall that I was using and pulled down his pants. I noticed that he was erect. I started to get an erection myself, so I tried to pull my pants up faster. Suddenly he grabbed my hand and placed it on his penis, and then grabbed my penis. I couldn't believe what was going on. I didn't think anyone could have the same thoughts and feelings that I did. We continued to play with each other until we heard someone approaching the bathroom. We stopped what we were doing, pulled our pants up, and came out of the bathroom. It was Bobby, my other roommate, who had walked in. He asked us what we were doing in the bathroom together. I told him that we were just using the bathroom.

Every time we were alone he wanted to fool around. We were able to fool around one time after that. Every now and then he would give me a look like he wanted to do something, but someone would come in, so we weren't able to do anything.

September came and a night counselor started to work there. Her name was Cindy. Cindy and I got to be real close. We spent a lot of time together. I remember she would tell me stories and she would ask me to tell her one. I would always say that I didn't know any. One day she

told me that I had to make up one and we were going to write it down. I told her that I had never written anything before, and I didn't know how. She told me that she didn't want to hear it. We were going to do it like it or not. We spent about two hours making up the story. All I remember about the story is that it was about a boy who was lost in the woods, and he found a baby cub. The boy and the cub became good friends. When we were done she looked at her watch and realized that it was past my bedtime. As we were going up Mary the nurse was looking for me. When she bumped into us she asked me where I was. Cindy told her that it was her fault that we were late. Mary really didn't mind because she knew that I was with Cindy.

One day Cindy came in with a camera. She was a photographer in her spare time. She asked me if I wanted to learn how to take pictures and how to develop them. I told her that I would love to. There was a room downstairs that she used as a darkroom. The next day we took some pictures. I told her that I wanted a picture of her and me. When we developed the pictures I couldn't believe how the picture was made.

My life was going well. I was happier than I ever had been. I had friends and a life without conflict. I didn't have to hear anyone saying that I was in the way and that they couldn't do anything without having to take me with them. I felt like I had a whole new life, and I was happy with it. Whenever I went home, I couldn't wait to go back to the hospital. We had the opportunity to go home for the weekend, but we had to sign up to be able to go. I never really wanted to go home, so I didn't sign up for it often. It's not like I didn't miss my family. I did miss them a lot, but I had a life where I didn't feel like I was a burden.

Everything changed that October when Bill called me into his office.

"Hi Bill! You asked for me?"

"Yes, Carmelo! I have good news for you," he said with a smile, not knowing how I would react.

"What!"

"Well, you're going home in three weeks."

"For a weekend, right?"

"No, for good."

"What are you talking about?" I said with a sad look.

"You're going home in about three weeks. I was talking to Katie and she said that you are ready to go home for good."

"I don't want to go home. I want to stay here," I said as I started to cry.

"What's wrong? Why are you crying?"

"I don't want to go home. I want to stay here."

"But why?" he asked me.

"My family is always fighting, and I don't want to go home."

"I'm sorry, but you have to go home. We can't help you anymore. It's going to be all right, you'll see. Please stop crying," he said as he handed me a tissue.

I went back to my room to lie down. Lilly came and ask me if I wanted to take a walk around the courtyard. I went because she told me that she wanted to talk to me about something. As we were walking she asked me, "What's wrong Carmelo?"

"Nothing! Why do you ask?"

"I don't know! You just don't seem like yourself."

“I guess it’s because I got some bad news today,” I told her.

“What?”

“Well, Bill told me that I’ll be going home in three weeks.”

“That’s great! So why are you so sad about it?”

“It’s not so great.”

“What?” she asked me with a crazy look on her face.

I started to tell her why I didn’t want to go home. I never found out what Lily wanted to talk to me about. Jill came calling us.

“Hey guys, guess what? I’m going home in two weeks,” she said.

“Yeah, that’s great. Carmelo is going home in three weeks,” Lilly told her.

“I have to go tell Steve. I’ll see you later.”

When she left I told Lilly not to tell Jill what I told her.

The day came for me to go home. Jane helped me pack. I went to Bill’s office to give him a box I had made him with his name on it. My mother and Carmen came to get me. They showed my mother how to put my brace on. We had to wait until they got us a van to take us home. It was a long trip home. It was after 8 o’clock at night when we got home.

MIRROR

What do I see when I look in the mirror?

I see someone who's looking back at me. Someone, who doesn't know why, he's here. Someone who wants to know where he's going in this world, and how he is going to get there. When he asks me if I know the answer to his question, I say that I don't have the answer to his question. But I can say that what and where ever it is, I will be with him and he won't be alone, because I will be with him when he finds the answer.

Then I realized that I'm the only one in the mirror and I'm the only one who can answer those questions!

CHAPTER 3

When I got home, everybody came to see me. Everything was going well, but I still wanted to be back in the hospital. My mother had moved to a three-room apartment in Richmond Hill Queens, before I was discharged from the hospital. I slept in the living room, and my mother and Ralph (my stepfather) slept in the bedroom. They told me that the bedroom was mine but I had to stay in the living room until they got a sofa bed. It took like three years for us to get one. We fixed the room up the way I wanted it. We painted the room light blue. I helped them paint it. While we were painting we had a paint fight. We had a lot of fun painting the room. It took us about two days to paint the room.

A nurse came to check me once a week for two months, because when I was in the hospital I caught Ringworm and an infection on my penis. The nurse came to see how I was doing, and to see how my mother was taking care of me. The hospital gave me some equipment that I needed for the house.

Carmen would come over every now and then to see me. She lived with Nelson and Irene. Irene was seven months pregnant at the time.

I remember one time Carmen, Nelson, and I went to see my father in jail. My father was in prison before I went in the hospital. My mother wrote to him and told him that I was out of the hospital. My father wrote my mother and asked her to let Nelson and Carmen take me to see him, so Carmen and Nelson took me. Whenever someone went to visit him he would ask him or her to bring him some drugs in a balloon. The reason for putting it in a balloon is so the prisoner could swallow it. Then when they went to the bathroom they would shit it out and clean it. We put it in a balloon and hid it in my wheelchair, because it was a good place to hide it. They couldn't really check the wheelchair.

When we went in to visit him, he was so happy to see me. He gave me a hug and we talked until it was safe for us to pass him the drugs. He took the balloon and swallowed it. Then we continued with our visit. He told me that he made me a picture. I had to wait until we left to get it. It was a picture of a boy with three puppies jumping on him.

To get home we had to walk fifteen blocks to the train. On the way to the train station, Nelson wanted to scare me so he started running with me. He was zigzagging and he tried to run

Carmen down with the wheelchair. At first I liked it, but then he started going too fast. I was getting scared so I told him to stop. He called me a chicken.

When we got home I showed my mother the picture that my father made me. She asked me if I wanted to hang it up in my room. I said yes, so she did. I could see it from my bed in the living room. When I would look at it, I would think about my father. I wish that I still had the picture.

Everything was good for a month or so until New Year's Eve. We had a New Year's Eve party and everybody came to the house. My mother was there, and so were Nelson, Carmen, Miriam, Irene, Irene's mother, her little brother Eddie, Ralph, and two of Ralph's friends. Everyone was drinking. They asked Eddie and me if we wanted some champagne. I didn't want any because I hated alcohol. I hated the way my family would act when they got drunk. Every time they would drink they would always get into a fight, and New Year's Eve wasn't any exception. At midnight everybody said Happy New Year to each other. Everything was fine until one in the morning, and then the shit hit the fan. I don't remember how it began, but Irene and my mother started arguing and Nelson got into it. Then Ralph got into it. Before you knew it everyone was fighting. Nelson got mad and locked himself in the bathroom. I was going crazy. I wanted to walk out of the house but I couldn't so I had to sit there. I sat on my bed watching everybody fight like cats and dogs. Nelson came out of the bathroom and left the house. My mother, Irene, and Irene's mother were fighting. Irene saw Nelson leaving so she tried to go after him. My mother blocked the door so that Irene couldn't get out. Irene ended up climbing out the window. Try to imagine a woman nine months pregnant, ready to give birth at any time, going out of a first floor window.

The fight lasted what seemed like forever. Everybody went home, but my mother and Ralph kept on fighting until daylight. It was hell for me when they would drink. We had a coffee table in the living room. That night Ralph picked it up and smashed it on the floor. I was crying and trying to tell them to stop. They kept on fighting until my mother locked herself in the bathroom. She would be afraid that Ralph was going to hit her so she would lock herself in the bathroom. Sometimes he would hit her so she would hit him back or scratch him. I couldn't do any thing but watch what was going on.

My mother is an epileptic and she would sometimes have seizures when they were fighting. It would scare the shit out of me when she had a seizure because I thought that she was going to die. It would especially scare me when she had them when I was alone with her. The seizures would happen more often when she was drinking. Once she stopped drinking, the seizures diminished.

You don't know how much I thank God that she stopped drinking. When she would drink, she would turn into a . . . I don't know what to call it. It was like someone would take over her body. I don't know what, but it wasn't my mother. I could tell when she was drinking as soon as I looked at her. She stopped because once when she was drinking, I told her something that she didn't like and she slapped me. That was the second time she had ever hit me. The first time was when I was younger. I was screaming for no reason so she slapped me to calm me down. She hated having to do it, and she never hit me again, even if I deserved it. There were times that I really should have gotten hit, but she kept her cool.

After she hit me the second time, she realized how she would get when she drank and how she would hurt the people that she loves. She stopped drinking little by little. It wasn't until just before I moved out on my own that she stopped drinking totally. I really thank God that my mother had the strength and the willpower to stop drinking. I have to hand it to my mother for having the willpower to stop. Some people never stop drinking.

When my mother and Ralph would start to fight and she wasn't drinking, she would try not to fight with him. When she would drink and Ralph would start to fight with her it was like adding gasoline to the fire. I would tell her not to say anything to him, but she would tell me not to worry, and then she would go and fight with him.

There were times when they fought that I wanted to kill myself. Sometimes I couldn't take them fighting anymore. I would wish that I were dead. I would think about killing myself. Sometimes when they would go to sleep or go out, I would go into the kitchen to get a knife and try to stab myself, or go in the bathroom and get some pills to drink them. I never had the guts to do it, so I wished that I could walk so I could run away. Sometimes I would picture myself going down the stairs in my wheelchair. Sometimes I wished that someone would kidnap me; that's how much I wanted to leave. Since I couldn't, I had to sit there and hope that they would get tired and take their ass to bed, so I could go to sleep myself. Before I would go to bed, I would take whatever they had left and pour it down the sink.

A lot of the times they would drink until the next day and they would end up going to bed at nine or ten in the morning. I would pray that no one would come to wake them up. Sometimes Ralph's friends would come to get him and wake him up when they only had four or five hours of sleep. They would still be drunk and start to fight again. Sometimes when they would call for my mother or Ralph, I would try to rush to the window and tell whoever was calling them that they were sleeping or out.

There were times when I would only have three or four hours of sleep, if any. No matter how tired I was. I would always want to go to school just to get out of that house. I think I was the only kid that would hate when there was a three-day weekend or a vacation, because that would mean that I had to stay home and hear people fighting. All the other kids liked Fridays and hated Mondays. It was the opposite for me. I would love Mondays and hate Fridays.

I never wanted to miss school. School was the only place where I got away for a few hours. I learned to love going to school and didn't want to miss a day. Even when everything was all right at home, I liked to go to school. That was the only time I got out of the house. Carmen thinks that I finished school because of her. She told me if I dropped out she would kick my butt. When Carmen took care of me I never wanted to go to school because I would go out with her and stay out late. We were never home. We were out with her friends most of the time. When she moved in with Nelson and Irene, I had no way to get out.

Do you know how it feels when you want to get out of your house, and you can't? It's like dying of thirst and there is a cup of water five feet away from you, but you can't get the water because you are tied down in a chair. Then imagine that you have to sit there and watch other people drinking it. That's how I felt looking out of the window, watching the kids in my neighborhood playing outside.

Seven days after that New Year's Eve, January 7, 1982, Irene had Crystal, my niece. We all went to the hospital to see Irene and the baby. I couldn't go up to see them because I was too

young or something like that. I'm not so sure what the reason was. All I know is that I couldn't go upstairs to see them. I had to wait until they came home.

When Irene came home with Crystal, they brought her to the house so I could see her. I asked if I could hold her. They didn't let me. They told me that it was because she was sleeping. I knew it was because they thought that I might drop her. I really didn't mind because I understood.

When Nelson and Irene would bring Crystal over the house, they used to put her on the bed with me and tell me to watch her. I remember that year when they came over for my birthday. I didn't have a party, but my mother made a cake for me. My mother would always make sure that something special was done on my birthday. Nelson and Irene put Crystal on the bed next to me. They told me not to give her any cake because she was only two months old. I didn't care what they said. I wanted to give her a little taste of the cake. When they weren't looking, I took a little of the icing and put it on my finger, and put it in her mouth. They almost saw me (because I got some of the icing on her nose). When I heard them coming, I took my hand and wiped her nose.

Every time they would bring Crystal over the house, or I would go to their house, I would spend a lot of time with her. You could say that we grew up together. I was a kid too. I was fourteen. I know fourteen isn't a kid anymore, but back then it was.

As Crystal got older, she would mimic me. I was the one who taught her how to drink from a straw. I have to drink with a straw and she wanted some of what I was drinking. She would come up to me and ask me for some. She would try to take the cup from me. I would tell her no and try to show her how to drink with the straw. At first she would always bite on it, so I would drink from the straw to show her how to use it. Little by little she learned how to drink with a straw. When she was over the house and we were eating, I would have to feed her what I was eating or she wouldn't want to eat.

I would watch her sometimes. I remember one time I was over Nelson's and Irene's house. She was like one and a half and she was walking at the time. They wanted to go food shopping so they asked me to watch her. At this time she could walk so I said okay. I thought it would be okay because I told them to change her before they left. They also left a bottle made for her. I was playing with her when I started to smell something.

"I hope it's not what I think it is. Please God, don't let it be that she took a shit." I looked in her diaper and saw that she took a mean shit. "Aw fuck! Now I have to change her. How am I going to do this? I never did this before." So I went to get a rag and told Crystal to get me a diaper. Then I told her to lie down so I could change her.

I started changing her. I opened one tape on the diaper, and "WAM" that smell hit me like a brick. I started to yell for my brother and Irene. "I'm going to kill you guys for this when you get home." I was lucky she didn't move all that much. I made a little mess. I got a little shit on me, but I did it. I couldn't clean her all that well, but it was good considering that it was my first time changing a diaper. When they got home, I wanted to kill them.

When Crystal would come over, she would always wait with my mother for me to come home from school. When I got home she would come running out to the bus. When I got off the bus, she would jump up and give me a hug and sit on my lap. We lived on the first floor but there were four steps to climb. My mother would carry me into the house. She would put me over her

shoulder and bring me up, then come back down and get my wheelchair. My mother developed back problems later on in life from putting me over her shoulder to carry me up the stairs. While my mother was bringing me up, Crystal would try to bring the wheelchair up. My mother used to have to tell her to leave the chair alone and get in the house.

I missed a year of school when I was in the hospital. It took me until the middle of January 1983 to go back to school. When I came home from the hospital I had ringworm. I couldn't go back to school until it went away.

I went back to school in late January of 1983. Everything was fine for a week, but then it went back to the same old boat, everybody putting everyone down and trying to be the big shot in the class. I thought it was going to be different. It wasn't. It was the same as it was when I left.

There was a special table in the classroom for the one kid who was considered the toughest kid in the class. Everyone wanted that table. All of the other kids knew not to mess with the person that who at that table. Whoever wanted that table had to fight or try to put down whoever had the table. Nicholas was the one who had the table. Everyone was afraid of him, because he was a big kid. He was so big that when you punched him, it wouldn't hurt him that much. You would have to watch out when he hit you because his arm was so heavy that when he would hit you, believe me, you would feel it. I know! He hit me a few times when we played around. Everyone would try to compete with him verbally, ranking each other out (which means putting each other down). There was one kid named Richard who wanted Nicholas's spot. He would try to fight Nicholas, but he couldn't beat him.

The number one kid in the class was Nicholas. Derek and I wanted to be number two, so Derek and I was always at each other's throats. Derek and Nicholas were becoming good friends because they both went to a club every other Saturday together. It was like a boys and girls club for handicapped kids between thirteen and twenty-one. I knew that I wanted and needed to get into the club, so I asked them how I could get in. Derek didn't want to tell me, but Nicholas gave me the number to call. My mother called and got me in. I used to go every other Saturday.

I had no idea how much that place was going to change my life. I had somewhere to go every other Saturday from 9 in the morning to 6 in the afternoon. I was out of the house when my mother and Ralph used to drink. There were a lot of things to do there. You could play sports, do arts and crafts, or just meet new friends.

One day I met a man named Jeff who worked there. He was disabled too, but not that much. He was a midget in a wheelchair. He would always talk to me. I liked having someone to talk to. I thought he was a nice guy. I got to like him, until one day.

He came out and asked, "Do you like boys?" I couldn't believe what I had heard.

"WHAT! What did you say?"

"Do you like boys?"

"Why are you asking me that?" I asked him.

He put his hand on my shoulder and said, "I watch you and I see how you look at them."

"What are you talking about? I look at them like I look at everybody else." He just patted me on the leg and told me that he understood.

I knew that I had some feelings towards boys, but I didn't know why I was having them. I thought I was crazy for having those feelings. I learned how to deny them and hide them.

Jeff was always nice to me. He got me to trust him. I was able to talk to him about what was going on at home. It helped me deal with what went on at home. He used to tell me that he understood how I felt. I felt like I had someone I could talk to and who would help me. I thought he was the only one I could trust until one Saturday. The heat wasn't working, so we had to keep our coats on. I had my coat on and I had to go to the bathroom. I couldn't go with my coat on. I needed some help, so I asked him where I could get someone to help me go to the bathroom. He told me that he could help me if I wanted him to. I said okay, not knowing what was going to happen to me.

He told me that the bathroom that was for us kids wasn't working, but there was another bathroom that we could go to. I said okay and went with him. I didn't think anything of it, so we went up to the next floor. When we got to the bathroom, it was very small, so only one wheelchair would fit in. He told me to go in with my wheelchair, and he would get up out of his and walk in. I went in and he came in after me. After using the bathroom, I started to pull up my pants. He told me that he would help me pull up my pants. I thought that he was going to pull my pants up, but instead he pulled down his pants.

"What are you doing?" I asked him, and I tried to get up.

He pushed me back down and told me, "Sit down and don't move." He tried to grab my penis.

I pushed his hand away from me and told him, "Leave me alone! I want to go back up."

He told me to shut up and sit still. I went to try to open the door to get out. I started to cry.

"Shut up. You know you like it, so shut up or I will hit you." He told me that as he went to grab me again. He grabbed my penis and he told me to hold his. I tried to pull my hand away, but he was holding my hand too tight. The more I tried to pull away, the tighter his grip got. I realized that I couldn't do anything but stay still and let him do what he wanted.

He asked if I liked what he was doing to me. I told him no. Just then I was going to come. I didn't know what was going on. It felt to me like I had to go to the bathroom again.

"Stop, I have to go to the bathroom. I'm going to go on myself!" Just then, I came. I got scared. That was the first time that I had ever ejaculated. After I came, he made himself come. He came on me. At this point I was really scared. I didn't know what he was going to do next.

After it was over he grabbed me by my neck and said to me, "You better not tell anybody what happened here, because it was your fault. You made me do this. If you do tell anybody they are not going to believe you, and I will kill you. I know your address. I will go to your house and kill you and your family."

As he was telling me that, he grabbed my neck harder. I really thought that he was going to kill me. We heard someone coming so he let me go and pulled up his pants. He took some toilet paper and wiped up the sperm and pulled my pants up. Just before he went to open the door he told me, "Remember, if you ever tell anybody what happened, I'll kill you."

I didn't know what to do. I really thought that he was going to kill me. He made me feel it was my entire fault. I went up and stood in a corner by myself.

When a counselor saw that I was in the corner, she knew that there was something wrong with me. I was crying, so she asked me what was wrong and went to touch me. I pulled away from her.

“What’s wrong Carmelo? Are you all right?”

As she asked me, I saw Jeff coming towards us. I told her that my stomach was hurting. Jeff came up to us and asked what was going on. She told him that I was having stomach pains. Then she asked me if I wanted to lie down. I said yes, thinking that I would get away from Jeff. As we were leaving, someone came and told her that she was needed. Jeff told her that he would take care of me. She told me to go with him. I didn’t want to go with him, but I had to.

As she left, he pulled me to the side, grabbed my arm real hard and said to me, “I hope you wasn’t thinking about telling her what we did!”

“No, I wasn’t! Let my arm go, you’re hurting me.”

“Good! Don’t forget what I told you. I will kill you and your family. You see I have your address.” He showed me that he did have my address. “Anyway, nobody is going to believe you.”

Then Nicholas came to tell me that they were going to play baseball and he wanted me to be on his team. I said okay. I really didn’t feel like playing but I wanted to get away from Jeff, so I went with Nicholas.

That wasn’t the only time that Jeff molested me. The next time I went there I tried to stay away from him, but he got me alone in the elevator. A few of us were going upstairs and he was running the elevator. There wasn’t any more room for me, so I had to wait for the next elevator. I was hoping that someone would come before he came back down, but no one came. When he came back to pick me up, I didn’t know what to do. I had to go up, so I went in. As I was going in the elevator I knew he was going to do something.

When I went in, he asked me, “How is my special friend doing?”

I didn’t say anything. I just looked down.

“What’s wrong? Look at me,” he said as he pulled my head up.

When he pulled my head up he reached to stop the elevator. That’s when I knew he was going to molest me again.

“It’s been two weeks since I saw you. I missed you. Did you miss me?” he asked me.

I didn’t say anything. I just looked back down. Then I saw his hands going towards my pants. I put my hand on my pants and tried to stop him.

He grabbed my hand and said, “Don’t fight me, Carmelo. You know you like it.”

I didn’t know what to do. I was afraid that he was going to hurt me so I didn’t do anything to stop him. He opened my pants and grabbed me, and started to jerk me off. He stopped to open his pants when the bell rang to let him know that someone needed the elevator. At first he didn’t stop, but they kept on ringing, so he had to stop. He pulled his pants up and mine.

“Remember Carmelo, don’t tell anybody about this, or I’ll kill you,” he told me as he went to turn the elevator on.

When the elevator doors opened, I didn’t know what to do. I just went looking for Nicholas and Derek. I made sure that I went everywhere with them.

The two times it happened I really didn’t have time to think about what had happened because each time I went and stayed over Nicholas’s house. I used to stay over his house when we went to the center. It was easy for me to go to his house because we rode in the same van. When I would go to his house I had so much fun there. I was able to forget about what happened for the time that I was there. It helped a lot being there.

When I would go home, I would remember what went on the day before with Jeff. I wanted to see if I could make myself come. I had tried before, but I didn't know exactly how to make myself come. I used to play with myself, but I never could make myself come. I used to see something white come out, so I thought I came. When Jeff molested me and I saw what was supposed to happen and how it felt, I wanted to see if I could make it happen again. When my mother went out and I was alone, I would go to the bathroom and lock the door and start to play with myself. I used to do it whenever I had a chance. I mostly did it when I took a bath.

Some nights I couldn't sleep. Every time I closed my eyes I would see Jeff doing what he did to me. I would wake up in the middle of the night and not be able to go back to sleep. He used to call me to ask me if I told anyone what he did to me. Then he used to talk dirty to me. He would ask me if I ever had anybody put his dick up my ass, and he would tell me that he wanted to do it to me. He used to tell me how he wanted to show me how it feels to get it in the ass. He would ask me to go to his house to meet his friends. I would tell him that my mother wouldn't let me stay over anyone's house. Every time he was going to hang up, he would always remind me that if I ever told anybody what happened he would kill me. He also would tell me that what had happened was because I wanted it to. Also that it was my fault and if I said anything they would think I was making it up. I didn't say anything to anybody. I just kept it to myself and tried to forget about it.

One day he showed up at my house. When I saw him, I didn't know what to say or do. I thought to myself, "Mommy is here so nothing is going to happen." Then my mother came and told me that she was going to the store and that she would be back in about a half-hour. He told my mother that he would stay with me and watch me for her.

"Do you want anything?" she asked me. I just told her to hurry up back. When she left I was on my bed and Jeff gave me a look like he was going to do something. I got up off the bed and got on my wheelchair. I thought if I stayed on the bed I wouldn't be able to stop him if he tried anything. When I got on my chair he touched me on my leg.

I pushed his hand away from me and told him, "You better stop. My mother is coming back soon."

"She said that she's going to be gone for about a half hour," he told me.

Then he went to touch my leg again. I didn't know what to do, so I froze up. Just as he was going to open my pants, we heard my mother talking to someone. He stopped and closed my pants up and told me not to say anything. Thank God my mother came in.

"Look Carmelo! Look who's here! They are going to stay with us," she said as she opened the door. It was my aunt Etta and my two cousins Arnold and Elvin and their three sisters. Etta had a fight with Jamie, her husband, so they stayed with us for about three months. Jeff saw that we had company, so he told me that he was going to go and he'd see me next Saturday at the center.

That Saturday I took Arnold and Elvin with me, so I wouldn't be alone and he wouldn't be able to get me alone. He stopped going after me when he realized that I wasn't going to let him touch me again, because I always had my cousins with me. He saw that I wasn't scared of him any more. I would hang up on him when he would call me. I just got to the point that I couldn't take him trying to scare me any more. I didn't care what he would do to me. I also realized that he couldn't hurt my family or me.

I was on the bus with Nicholas and these two girls that were sisters. Nicholas liked one of them, but I didn't care for either one. In fact, I used to fight with them. Nicholas and me used to fight with them a lot. They didn't like me at all, because I used to pull their hair. Sometimes one of the girls that Nicholas liked would give him a kiss and let him feel her butt. I would try to feel up her sister, but she wouldn't let me because she didn't like me.

One day Nicholas said to me, "I know a way you can get them to let you touch them too."

"How? They don't even like me."

"All we have to do is make them think you're somebody else."

"WHAT? What the hell are you talking about?" I asked him.

"We tell them that you are Carlos, Carmelo's twin brother."

"Are you nuts? They are not going to believe that."

"Just go along with me. I want you to say hi to them like you don't know them."

"Okay, if you say so! They are not going to go for it, you watch," I told him shaking my head. When they got on the bus I said hello to them and asked what their name was.

"Cut the shit Carmelo, stop acting like you don't know us."

"That's not Carmelo," Nicholas told them.

"What are you talking about? That's Carmelo."

"This is Carmelo's twin brother Carlos. Right Carlos?"

"Yeah I'm Carmelo's twin brother. He told me about you two," I told them, trying not to laugh.

"How come we never met you?" they asked me.

"I don't like to go everywhere my brother goes. My mother only signed one of us up so only one of us can come. Carmelo didn't want to come today, so my mother let me come."

So they believed it. When I wanted to pick on them I would be Carmelo, and when I wanted them to like me I would be Carlos.

In school the day before, Nicholas asked me if I wanted to stay over his house. I said yes, and we decided that we could have the van drop us both off at his house. When we got to Nicholas' house, his mother told me to call my mother to let her know that I got there. I called and let my mother know everything was all right. I was so busy having fun with Nicholas that I forgot about what happened with Jeff that day. Nicholas and I played with his video game until his mother called us to go eat. His family made me feel at home. I met his mother Geegee, his sister Nicky, and his father Dan. They were so nice to me. It didn't feel like it was my first time there.

At the time I didn't know that Dan was Nicholas's father, because Nicholas introduced him to me as his uncle. I always thought that he was his uncle. Nicholas always introduced him as his uncle in school. We went on a school trip to Coney Island (amusement park). We were told we could bring someone with us. I asked Irene to go with me, and Nicholas brought his father with him.

That day I wanted to kill Irene, because she tricked me into going on a ride that I didn't want to go on. It was a ride that you get into something and it goes up in the air. I didn't know that; I thought that it just went around in circles. Irene told me that because she wanted to go on

it and she couldn't go on without me. When Irene saw that the ride was slowing down and going to stop she said, "Look Carmelo, lets go on that ride. See it doesn't go that fast."

Like a jackass, I believed her and went on the ride. At first I liked it, but when the ride started to go faster and we went upside down I wanted to kill Irene. I thought I was going to die on that ride. I said to Irene, "I can't breathe! I want to get off."

Irene told me to calm down while she was laughing. When I got off the ride I felt sick. I didn't go on any more rides, but I had fun that day. Later on I found out that Nicholas didn't want any body to know that his uncle was his father because he drank a lot. That day when I went to his house I believed that Nicholas's father was his uncle.

One day his mother and sister wanted to kill me. Nicholas and I were play fighting and like I said before, he was a big kid. I'd say he was a good 160 lbs. Remember he had Muscular Dystrophy. Muscular Dystrophy makes you weak, and it makes the weight you have dead weight. It makes a person feel heavier than they are.

He had two beds in his room. His sister sometimes would have to sleep in the room with him when he was sick. We were fighting and he bet me that I couldn't push him off the bed.

"I could push you off if I wanted to," I told him.

"You're too weak to do anything to me."

"Oh yeah, you think so?"

Then I went behind him and started to push him. At first he didn't move, so I started to tickle him. He started to laugh, so it made it easy to get him off the bed. He landed on his butt real hard, so he started to laugh harder. His mother was downstairs and she heard a thump. When Nicholas's mother came upstairs she saw him on the floor, and we were laughing like crazy.

"What's going on here?"

"We were playing and he pushed me off the bed," he told his mother.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean it," I told her.

She had to call Nicky to help her pick Nicholas up off the floor. They were having trouble picking him up because he was laughing. They finally got him on the bed. His mother told us not to do that again. That night went by so fast that before I knew it, it was the next day, and I had to go home.

One Saturday I took Arnold and Elvin with me to the boys' and girls' club because that Friday in school Derek and I had a fight, but Mr. Freedman stopped it.

"I'll get you tomorrow, you watch," Derek told me as Mr. Freedman was pushing us away from each other. There was one thing that worried me about Derek. I knew Derek used to bring his cousin Kareen with him. I knew that our classmate Richard and Kareen would jump in. I took Arnold and Elvin with me in case they did.

When we got there, I went up to Derek and said, "So here we are! What are you going to do now?"

So he swung at me and hit me in the chest. I turned and punched him in the leg. I saw that he was reaching for his footrest, so I took mine out too. We were going to hit each other with them when Arnold grabbed me. Kareen grabbed Derek and separated us. As they were pulling us apart, we were calling each other names.

"Why did you pull me away from him?" I asked Arnold as he was pushing me. He told me that he didn't want me to get in trouble.

That April 1984 was when we had the big snowstorm. That was the first time I had ever seen it snow in late April. There was like 7 inches of snow. My cousins and I, Arnold and Elvin, went out to play in the snow. While we played, we made angels in the snow. One of us got the idea to go around knocking on people's doors and asking them if they wanted us to shovel the snow for them. We made about \$15, and we split it up three ways. We spent it on junk, like kids do.

That reminds me, there was a five and ten store. Three old ladies ran it. Arnold, Elvin, and I used to go in and steal toys from there. We made believe that we were looking around the store. When we knew that no one was looking, we would place a toy in my chair. We put all kinds of toys in my wheelchair. Sometimes we would buy something so they wouldn't catch us. As we were leaving they would tell us to come back whenever we wanted, because the store was big enough for me to get around in with the chair.

We would take things like toy guns, playing cards, puzzles, and things like that. When we left the store, we would put them in the mud to make it look like we found them. We would go home and I would say to my mother, "Look Ma, look what we found in the garbage." She would believe us. Every three days, we would come home with toys until the store went out of business.

I went to stay with my cousins. My aunt would give us money to buy whatever we wanted. We would spend it on video games. Sometimes when we wanted something to eat or drink and we didn't have the money, we would steal it. One day Arnold, Elvin, and me wanted to get something but we didn't have the money, so Arnold and me stole some candy and cookies. When we got home Arnold and I had a fight with Elvin. We didn't want to share with him, so Elvin got mad and told Etta that we stole something. We got in trouble. For three weeks we couldn't go out or do anything.

CHAPTER 4

I only spent part of the summer with my two cousins, so when school started I was happy to go back so I would have something to do. I never did like the summer all that much because I had to stay home most of the time. I would stay in the house watching TV, or if I went out I would only stay on the block. I would push the chair to the corner and back and it would take me a long time to do it. When September came, I would get happy knowing that school was around the corner. That meant that I would have somewhere to go.

The only thing I didn't like about going back to school was hearing the other kids talk about how much fun they had at camp. I never went to camp because my mother wanted me to spend part of the summer with my father, and besides, she didn't know how to enroll me in summer programs like camp. She did send me to summer school once. I liked it a lot. They took us on trips to the park and all kinds of summer events. They had an event named The Summer Games where schools competed against each other for medals in different sporting events. It is the disabled version of the Olympics. I won a few medals in those games.

When I went back to school it was back to competing with my classmates. I didn't mind. I got used to it. When it was warm outside, Mr. Freedman would take us out for the last period. We would sometimes play baseball in the courtyard. Mr. Freedman liked to take his tennis racket and balls to practice his serve. Sometimes when we made fun of him, he would yell at us.

On teacher/parents night, all the parents would attend. My mother only went one or two times. My mother never was into going to those meetings.

One day we were on our lunch break. After we ate we would go back to our room for recess. John, one of my classmates, asked me about my father.

Richard started teasing me saying, "He don't have a father. That's why he never comes to the school, and his mother is too lazy to come to the school."

I lied and said, "I have a father. He lives in Puerto Rico. He works for the Mafia and he's rich."

"Yeah right! Your father don't work for anybody," Derek said.

"My father is rich. He has so much money that he put \$10,000 in the bank for me. I get it when I'm 21 years old. He also sends me \$40 a month."

"Yeah right! You don't get anything. You're lying," Richard said.

“All right, you don’t believe me.”

“How much money do you have on you?” Derek asked me.

“I didn’t bring any money.”

“You don’t get shit, you’re lying,” Derek said.

“I get more than you do.”

“I bet you that you can’t even bring \$5 tomorrow.”

“\$5 – that’s all? I bet you that I bring \$10 in,” I said, putting my foot in my mouth.

“I bet that you’re not going to bring shit,” Derek said.

“What? Do you want to make a bet?”

“Whoever loses has to buy the winner lunch for a whole week,” Derek said.

I was hoping that my mother would be able to give me the money. I didn’t know what I would have done if she hadn’t given it to me. I know she was going to ask me what I needed it for. I told her that there was going to be a party in my class. They asked the kids if they could bring \$10 in to help for the party. I asked her for \$10 because I wanted to bring in more than what the bet was. I wanted to bring in \$15 and I already had \$5. She gave it to me without any problems. I was so happy that she gave it to me. I thought that I was going to have to hear Derek talking shit, but I had the money and now they would believe me.

So the next day when I went to school, I didn’t say anything just to see what Derek would say.

Derek came up to me and said, “So Carmelo, do you have the money?”

I wanted to play with him. I made believe that I didn’t have the money. I looked in my pocket like I didn’t have it.

“I can’t find it. I must have left it home.”

“I knew that you wasn’t going to bring it. Your father doesn’t have shit. Now you have to pay for my lunch for the whole week, if you can afford it.”

Just then I pulled out the money and said, “I’m not paying for shit. You’re the one that has to pay for my lunch for the week, see I got the money. Not just \$10, but \$15 asshole.”

He didn’t know what to say. He had to pay for my lunch for that week. After that, everybody believed that my father was rich.

After that week it was back to the drawing board with the fights. You would think that because we were disabled we wouldn’t be fighting. It wasn’t so. We would fight just as much as if we weren’t disabled. For example, there were two Special Ed classes right next to each other. One class was for the younger kids and the other for the older kids. Some times we would have to share the classroom when one of the teachers was out. One day we were sharing a room and one of the kids from the other class started with Nicholas. Nicholas got mad so they started to fight when the teacher stepped out for a minute. Nicholas picked up a book and hit the kid in his face and broke his nose. They had to call the kid’s mother to come and take him home. Since that day they never let us in the same room alone together again. They made sure that they had someone watching us so we wouldn’t fight. That didn’t stop us from fighting.

I always liked going to school. Yes I had a lot of fights, but I had lots of fun too. I liked Christmas time the most. We used to go on Christmas trips to see Santa Claus. I never did believe in him. I just liked going to get the toys. They always gave us cheap toys. The kinds of toys that

we got were little pinball games, little cars, and things like that. Sometimes when a kid left their toys unattended I would take them.

We got two weeks off for Christmas vacation. One year my father came and got me to spend Christmas with him. He had a new daughter named Denise from the lady that he was living with. Counting Denise I now had four sisters – Miriam, Carmen, and Nilsa – and two brothers – Nelson and George Junior I lost track of George Junior and Nilsa when they were put up for adoption. I lost track of Denise when her mother and my father broke up. Now I only know the whereabouts of my two older sisters, Carmen and Miriam, and my older brother Nelson.

That Christmas there was a truck called Big Track that came out. It was a truck that you had to program for it to work. I liked any toy that had batteries and buttons; I still do. My father asked me what I wanted for Christmas. I told him that I wanted the truck. It cost about \$75 and father told me that he couldn't get it because it cost too much. I had to pick out another toy.

On the night of Christmas Eve at 12 midnight my stepsister and I wanted to open our gifts, so my father let us open just one. On Christmas Day we opened our other gifts. I was mad when I saw that my stepsister got the toy that she wanted, and I didn't. I didn't say anything to my father. He saw that I was upset. My father had gotten me clothes and toys that I had picked out, but not the Big Track.

I got upset so he came up to me and said, "Look what I found in the room, another gift, and it has your name on it." I opened it and it was the Big Track. I stayed with my father until New Year's Day, and then he took me home because the next day I had to go back to school.

Everything was fine until April of that year, when my mother had to put me in another school. You see Nelson had a pair of handcuffs and he let me hold them. I took them to school one day. When Mr. Freedman left the room I took them out of my book bag and was showing them off. Nicholas wanted to try something.

"Carmelo, why don't we handcuff our chairs together to see if I can pull you?"

I put the handcuffs on our chairs and Nicholas was pulling me when Mr. Freedman came in. When he saw that we were handcuffed together he went through the roof.

"What the hell is going on here? Whose handcuffs are those?" I told him that they were mine. He tried to take them off, but he couldn't.

"Where are the keys, Carmelo? Give me the keys!" I gave him the keys and he opened the cuff that was on Nicholas's chair. He went to open the cuff that was on my chair, but I didn't let him.

He said, "Carmelo let go of the hand cuffs."

"Why, so you can take them? I'm not letting shit go." I said as I pushed him.

When I pushed him his face turned so red that it looked like a tomato. He grabbed my wheelchair and took me to the teacher's lounge.

When we got there he told me "Carmelo, give me the keys or I will call your mother."

"I don't care what you do. I'm not giving you anything."

He grabbed my hand, so I scratched him. When I scratched him, he smacked me, bent my hand back, took the keys and the handcuffs away from me and said, "You'll get them back when your mother comes to school."

When he took me back it was lunchtime, so he took me to the lunchroom. My face and hand were hurting, so I started to cry. Everybody asked me if he had hit me. I told them that he smacked me. Debbie told me to tell my mother when I got home.

When I got home, I started to cry and my mother asked me why I was crying. I told her that Mr. Freedman smacked me. The next day mother went to school and came to my class. She asked Mr. Freedman to step out of the room so she could speak to him. He was scared. His face turned all red and you could see it in his face that he was shitting bricks. When they were in the hall you could hear my mother telling him off.

Derek turned to me and said, “Your mother looked real angry.”

Then we heard mother saying, “If you ever hit my son again you’ll be sorry, do you hear me?”

After five minutes they came back in. He was all pale as if he had seen a ghost. My mother told me that she would see me at home.

When she left, Mr. Freedman told Debbie to watch us. He had to go to do something. We all knew that he had to calm himself down. When he left, we all started laughing. I told them, “He’s lucky that it wasn’t my father that came to the school. My father would have killed him, or blown the school up. That’s why I didn’t tell my father that he hit me. I didn’t want the Mafia to come.”

When I went home my mother told me that I was going to another school. She spoke to the principle and they agreed to send me to PS 237 in three weeks. That was our last year with Mr. Freedman anyway. I was just leaving two months before my class.

The day before I left, my class gave me a going away party. We only worked half a day that day. Mr. Freedman got me a cake. It said “Good Luck Carmelo” on it. The party was Mr. Freedman’s idea. He told me that he was sorry for what he did.

When the day came for me to go to the new school, I was so excited that I got up at 5 o’clock that morning. The Bus Company always wants us to wait outside for the bus at 7:15a.m. They always come at 7:45a.m. When we got to the school, a lady named Henny, a teacher’s aid, was waiting for me. My teacher’s name was Ms. Hocstean. She was very nice. I liked her a lot. I didn’t have a crush on her. I just liked her. Unlike Mr. Freedman, she taught us kids.

I made new friends in my class, like Armondo, a girl named Tracy, Vinny, Bobby, Danny, and a few other kids. That school was where I began to learn to read – not that much but enough to get by.

We had gym twice a week. The gym coach was Mr. Dorch. I never had gym before, so it was new to me. We used to play things that I hadn’t played before like volleyball, dodge ball, and things like that. I had fun, but no one liked Mr. Dorch all that much. He had a bad temper. He would yell at you if you did something that he didn’t like. No one liked it when we found out that he was going to be the new seventh grade teacher in September.

I used to keep in touch with Nicholas by phone. I sometimes spent the weekend with him. When school ended Nicholas came over my house. I never had any of my friends over my house before. I was ashamed of my house and I didn’t want anybody to know how I really lived. I didn’t want them to know how my mother and Ralph use to get when they drank. Also they might find out that I was lying about my father being rich.

That summer Nicholas asked me if I wanted to stay over his house until he went to camp. He wanted me to spend the 4th of July with him. I was so happy to get out of my house for a week or two. I almost never had a good summer, because I would be home for the summer vacation. So when he asked me if I wanted to stay over his house for two weeks, I said yes.

I'll never forget that 4th of July. Nicholas's mother got us a big bag of fireworks to set off that night. When it got dark we went to the front of his house with the bag of fireworks to set them off. We had some Jumping Jacks, which are fire works, and I wanted to try something out with them. Because they jump, I took off one of my wheelchair brake poles and put the jumping jack in it. I thought if I put one in the pole it would jump out of the pole, but it didn't. Believe me, I will never do that again. It stayed in the pole and the pole heated up. I tried to let go of the pole, but it got so hot that it stuck to my hand. I had to give it a good smack for it to get off of my hand.

The funny thing about getting burned was that the burn was in a heart shape. Nicholas started laughing and said, "Look! The pole loves you. It left a heart on your hand."

We both started laughing. Nicholas's mother came to tell us it was time to go in. When I showed her the burn, she asked me what happened. We told her what happened. She called us crazy and went to get something for the burn. She gave me some ice to put on it. When she saw the shape that the pole left, she started to laugh.

The next day when we got up I had a water blister, so his mother had to pop it to get the water out.

I was like; "You are not going to stick me with that pin."

"Don't tell me that you are scared of a little needle," Nicholas said laughing.

"It's not going to hurt, I'm just going to open it so I can get the water out," Nicholas's mother said as she grabbed my hand and popped it. It felt funny having that water coming out. It took about four to five months before the burn went away. When it was drying up, I used to like to peel the old skin off.

I had a lot of fun with Nicholas. I remember that was the year that Michael Jackson came out with *Thriller*. He had the 45 of that song. I was taping it when Nicholas started with me. He didn't want to let me tape it, so he took the tape from me and punched me in the arm. I got mad and started to chase him around the house. He started to run from me. My chair got stuck so I got out of the chair to get on the floor. I started hopping around the house trying to get him. His mother was downstairs. She heard the banging from us running around. She thought that someone fell so she came up to see what was going on. You should have seen her face when she came up and saw that I had him in a headlock.

"What are you two doing?"

"Nothing Ma! We were just playing," Nicholas said as I let him go.

"When I heard all that noise downstairs, I thought that you two were killing each other."

"I'm sorry for the noise; it won't happen again," I told her.

"Okay! You two should get ready for bed; it's almost 12 midnight. Nicholas, let me put you on the bed and I'll come back to change you, and Carmelo you should get ready too. Nicholas, I'll be back to help you get changed when I finish what I'm doing downstairs," she said to us as she put Nicholas on the bed.

When she left I changed, then I asked him if I could help him. He told me that he didn't think that I could help him change.

I said as I grabbed the back of his shirt, "Just shut up and put your head down so I could get your shirt off." I got his shirt off. His mother came in as I was trying to get his pants off.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm just trying to help him with his clothes."

She thanked me and took over.

Nicholas and I always used to help each other out. However, there were two things that I disliked. He would always wake up at six in the morning and have to go to the bathroom. Since he needed help to sit up, he would always wake me up to help him. Our beds were right next to each other. Sometimes I wouldn't get up when he called me so he would hit me with his pillow, and he didn't hit soft. He would hit me hard to make sure I got up. I would put my shoes on before I would help him up. One time when I was pulling him up, I had only socks on. I went to pull him up and my foot slipped. I fell right on my ass real hard, and I mean hard. I wanted to kill him because he started to laugh. At first I got mad that he was laughing, but I started to laugh too because he was laughing so much that he pissed on himself. His mother and his sister Nicky came running in the room because they heard something fall. When they saw me on the floor laughing they asked what happened. When we told them they started to laugh. Since that day I made sure that I put my shoes on before I helped him. The other thing that I disliked was when I needed him to help me with my food. He would take a bite out of it when I wasn't looking.

We used to drive his mother crazy coming in and out of the house. His mother used to give us some money to go to the store so we could get out of the house. I couldn't push myself that well, so he would help me on the hills. Since he was much stronger than I was, he would let me hold on to his wheelchair while he pushed himself up the hill. He used to live about nine blocks from my brother Nelson and Irene's house. We went there about two times to see them. I had a lot of fun when I was with him and his family. When the two weeks were up I didn't want to leave, but I had to because Nicholas was going to camp.

That summer I made about \$150 dollars in three and a half weeks. I used to sell Kool Aid in front of my house or at the corner. We had a big pitcher with a little funnel so the liquid would be able to come out. Twice a week my mother would fill the pitcher with Kool Aid and ice cups, and set me up outside with the Kool Aid.

Ralph used to paint people's houses sometimes. That summer he painted someone's house that used to work in a movie theater. The guy had some posters and a bunch of 8 X 10 cards from the movie "The Main Event" (starring Barbara Streisand) in his basement. He gave them to Ralph and Ralph came home with the stuff that the guy gave him. He gave them to me so I could sell them. Ralph said that he wasn't sure if anybody would buy them, but if anybody could sell them, I could. The next day I went in front of my house with the Kool Aid, the posters and the things that Ralph got from the guy. There were five cards in each pack, and I had about fifty packs. I opened all of the packs and sold them for \$0.25 each. The posters I sold for \$0.75 to a dollar.

When people would come by I would try to stop them and make them buy some of the merchandise. Sometimes they would stop and buy some Kool Aid, the poster, or the cards. A lot of the times they would just give me the money and wouldn't take anything. I would try to make

them take something, but they wouldn't, so I took the money, and gave them a smile and thanked them. I wasn't going to say no. I spent some of the money on video games and junk, and with the rest I helped my mother get my school clothes.

Elvin came to stay with us in the middle of the summer. I know kids do crazy things when they don't have anything to do. I doubt that most kids would have done what we did. One day we were outside and we didn't have anything to do so I asked Elvin, "Yo Elvin, why don't we go to Nelson's house?" My brother used to live like three and a half to four miles from me.

"How are we going to get there? We don't have any money to take the bus. I hope you're not thinking that I'm going to walk there."

"Why? We've walked there before."

"Yeah, I know! I'm not going to walk there now. It's too late. It's 10 p.m. By the time we get there it will be 11:30 p.m. I do want to go but . . ." as Elvin was saying that, a cop car was going by.

I turned to Elvin and said, "Wait! I have an idea!"

"I don't like the way you said that. What are you thinking? I know that look."

"We could get the cops to take us there."

"How the hell?" Elvin asked.

"Well we can call 911 and tell them that we are lost and we need help to get home."

"Are you nuts? Even if they believe us, what are we going to tell Nelson when he sees us going there in a cop car?"

"Who says that he has to know we had the cops take us there?" I said.

"But Carmelo, he's going to see the cop car."

"Not if we tell the cops that we live in a house two blocks away."

"Okay, lets do it. I hope it works," Elvin said as we went to call.

When the cops came we got a little scared.

Elvin looked and asked me, "Do you really want to do this?"

"We can't back down now. They're here."

So we went in the cop car and off we were. The cop was asking us what we were doing so far from home. We didn't know what to say. We told them that we got on the wrong bus.

As we got closer to Nelson's house, like three blocks away, we told them that they could leave us there and we would walk the rest of the way. They told us that they had to leave us in front of our house. Elvin and I looked at each other like, "What the hell are we going to do now?"

I saw a house that was dark, so I said that we live there thinking that they were going to let us go, but they didn't. One of them knocked on the door. Elvin and I hoped that no one was home, but they were. You could imagine the look on our face when we saw someone open the door. When the cop asked if we lived there and they said no, he came back to the car with a mean look on his face.

He said, "If you kids don't tell us where you live we're going to take you both down to the station."

When we heard that, we sang like two jailbirds. When we got there, he knocked on the door and Irene came out. We were in the cop's car shitting bricks when we saw the cop talking to Irene. The windows were open and we heard them talking. He told her that we called them saying

that we were lost, and we tried to tell them that we lived two blocks down. Irene thanked them and said she was going to talk with us.

When we got upstairs Irene asked us, "Are you guys crazy or what? Why did you tell the cops that you were lost?"

"We wanted to come over and we didn't have money for the bus, so we called 911 and said we were lost," I said.

"It was Carmelo's idea. He told me to call them," Elvin said.

"When your brother comes back from the store and hears what you did he's going to kill you both," Irene said looking at me.

We both got on our knees and begged her not to tell Nelson. As we were begging her not to tell Nelson, we heard him coming up the stairs.

"I guess he's home. What should I do?" she said with a big smile on her face, like in a way she's saying to us, "I got you now!"

"What are you guys doing here?" Nelson asked us.

"We didn't have anything to do, so we thought we'd come over," we said.

"How did you guys get here?" he asked.

We both looked at Irene. She gave us a smile and said, "Go ahead Carmelo, tell your brother how you got here. Go ahead."

I didn't know what to say. My mouth opened but nothing would come out.

Then Irene said, "You want me to tell him? Okay, I'll tell him. You won't believe how they got here."

When she said that, Elvin and I turned and looked at each other like, "That's our ass. Now we're up shits creek."

"How did they get here? What did they do, hitch hike?" Nelson said to Irene. When he said that, we were sure that she was going to tell him.

Then she said, "They walked all the way over here."

We were so relieved that she didn't tell him about the cops.

When Nelson went to the bathroom she said, "You guys owe me. After dinner you two are going to do the dishes and clean the kitchen after we eat."

"But!"

"But nothing. I could easily go tell Nelson how you two really got here," she said, cutting me off.

"Okay, we'll do the kitchen!"

After we ate, Elvin and I got up and were going to go watch TV in Nelson and Irene's room. Nelson was getting ready to do the dishes when Irene stopped him and said, "You don't have to do the dishes. Elvin and Carmelo said they would do them. Right boys?"

We just said, "Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!" and turned around and went in the kitchen. About a week after that, Elvin went home.

Nicholas came over one day. His mother dropped him off at my house. We had to stay outside that day because he was too heavy to take inside. It was a nice day so we didn't mind staying out that day. I introduced him to one of mother's friends who lived on the same block. I had my camera with me, so I had her take a picture of us. I was a little mad when I got the pictures out. The picture came out dark.

We went walking around the block. Then we went back in front of my house. My mother came out to bring us something to eat. Then Nicholas and I started talking when his foot started to bother him. He took off his sneakers, and his foot was swollen.

“What’s wrong with your foot?” I asked him.

“I don’t know, it just started doing this like a week and a half ago.”

“Have you told your mother?”

“Yes, and she took me to the doctor. But he told her there’s nothing they could do.” As he was telling me that, I saw a tear running down his face.

“What’s wrong? Does it hurt?”

“No. Not really.”

“Then what’s wrong?”

“I’m scared. I don’t know. I feel like I’m getting weaker. I just don’t know what’s going on with me.”

Then my mother came to tell him that his mother called to say that she had to do something. She was going to be a little late.

It was getting dark when Ralph came out and said, “You guys, it’s getting dark, and it looks like it’s going to rain. I think you two should come in.”

“I know, but how is Nicholas going to get in?”

“I think I’m too heavy for you to carry me up the stairs,” Nicholas said to Ralph.

“Let me worry about that. I’m going to bring Carmelo in first. Then I’ll come to get you,” Ralph said as he took me in. Then he asked my mother to help him bring Nicholas up.

They went down to get Nicholas. They had a little trouble bringing him up, but they were able to get him in.

My mother said to Nicholas, “You should call your mother and let her know you are in the house. If you like you could ask her if you could stay the night.”

So he called his mother and asked her if he could stay over. As he was talking to his mother, I asked my mother, “Where is he going to sleep, Mom?”

“You and him can sleep in the room. Me and Ralph will sleep in here.”

“My mother said I could stay but she wants to talk to you,” Nicholas said, handing the phone to my mother.

That night went by fast. After we ate, we started to play Atari until 4am. Then we went to bed.

The next day Nicholas’s mother came to get him. She told him to ask me if I would like to spend a week or two with him, so he asked me. I was happy that he did ask me. I was going to ask if I could go and spend the weekend with him, but he asked first.

While I was at Nicholas’s house, Geegee (his mother) had a little party and some of her family came over. The next day Nicholas, James (his little brother) and I were in the backyard playing around. Nicholas and I didn’t have anything to do, so we started to pick on James.

James was coming out of the house when Nicholas said, “Lets get James!”

Nicholas tried to grab James, but he got away. He was running towards me when Nicholas told me to grab him. When I went to grab him he picked up a piece of metal that was left from a film from a Polaroid camera and cut me in the arm. It was a little cut but deep. James ran in and got Geegee. She came and asked what had happened. We told her that we were

playing, and I got cut with the metal. She took a look and saw that it wasn't a big cut, so she went and got something to stop the bleeding.

She said, "If this doesn't stop the bleeding, I'm going to have to take you to the hospital."

But it stopped, so she didn't have to take me to the hospital. Thank God. It left a little scar. I wanted to kill James, but I just punched him. When I went back home, Nicholas and me talked on the phone almost every day.

When school started, they gave Nicholas a motorized chair because he began to have trouble pushing himself. He was the first one to have a motorized chair. He used to give us rides. He would let us hold his chair and he would pull us.

Two months after school started, Nicholas got sick and he couldn't come to school. We continued to talk on the phone almost every day. I wanted to go see him but I couldn't. Three weeks went by until I got the chance to see him. I went to Nelson's house for a weekend, so I asked Irene to take me to see Nicholas. When we got there his mother told me that he was in bed because he wasn't feeling all that well.

As we walked in she said, "Hey Nicholas, look who came to see you."

"Hey Nick, what's going on?" I said while walking in the room.

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm staying with my brother for the weekend. I didn't have anything to do, so I asked Irene to bring me over."

Irene turned to me and said, "I'm going to leave you here. I'll come back to get you at about 8p.m. Okay?"

I said yes and she left.

"I'll be downstairs if you need something," Geegee said as she left.

Nicholas and me were talking when I asked him if I could sit in his motorized wheelchair. He asked me if I wanted to turn it on and try it, so I did. I didn't realize that the chair was on high. When I turned the chair on and pushed the control to make it move it went so fast that I ran into Nicholas's bed.

Nicholas started to laugh and said, "You almost busted your ass."

"Shut up! I didn't know it was on high. You should have told me."

He just kept on laughing. Then I started to laugh because his face turned red.

While I was there we were talking about school and other things. I saw that he was weak, but I didn't know how weak he really was. He asked me to tell everybody in school he said hi. When Irene came to get me, Nicholas asked me when I was going to come back to see him. I didn't know when. I told him that I would come soon.

"Make it real soon!" he said with a strange look in his eyes. I had no idea that would be the last time that I would see him, but I think he knew.

I would call him every day when I came home from school to tell him what went on that day. One day I got the biggest shock. When I went to call Nicholas, the phone was busy. I used to watch "Little House on the Prairie" every day. I decided to call him after my show. That day, "Little House on the Prairie" was about a fat boy and his family who had moved into the town. Everybody used to pick on him because he was a fat kid. For some reason when I saw the fat boy,

it made me want to call Nicholas. I went to call him. Nicky (Nicholas's sister) picked up the phone.

"Is Nicholas there?" I asked her.

"Um, he can't come to the phone right now," she said, hesitating, like she didn't want to tell me something. I heard Geegee in the background asking who was on the phone. Nicky told her that I was on the phone and that I was asking for Nicholas.

Geegee grabbed the phone and said, "Hello Carmelo?"

"Yes! How you doing?" I asked, not knowing what she was going to say, "Is Nicholas there. Can I speak to him?"

"I don't know how to tell you."

When she said that, I thought that she was just going to tell me that he was in the hospital. I knew that he was not feeling all that well, but never in my wildest dreams did I think that she was going to tell me what she was about to tell me.

"Um, Carmelo, Nicholas died last night."

I could not believe what she had said. I asked her to repeat what she had said. When she told me again, I did not know what to say. I just told her that I was sorry. When I hung up the phone, I went back and finished watching "Little House on the Prairie." At the end of it, the boy stood up for himself. It ended with him running with a smile on his face. When I saw that, a tear fell down my face. That's when I realized that Nicholas was dead. I started to cry. My mother was not home at the time. When she got home I told her. She could not believe it.

That was the first time I had a friend who died. We asked Geegee when the funeral would be held so I could go. She told me that she did not think it would be a good idea because she wanted me to remember Nicholas as he was when he was alive.

I used to call her, but as time went by I called less and less. I went to see her that summer with Elvin. We were going to Nelson's and I decided to go to see her. She was surprised to see me. She asked us to come in, so Elvin and I went in. I had not seen her since the day that I went to see Nicholas. It felt funny being there, knowing that Nicholas was not there. We stood there for a good while. While we were there Dan, Nicholas's father, came in. He was surprised to see me. It was like 8p.m. when Elvin told me that it was getting late and we should be going. Dan offered to take us home.

After that day, I lost touch with her. When I moved out of my mother's, I saw her again. It was New Year's Eve 1988. I was surprised when I got a call from Dan about a week before Christmas. I asked them how they got my number. They told me that they got it from information. We kept in touch with each other for about three weeks. That New Year's Eve they called me and asked me what I had planned for that night. I told them that I was going to stay home. Dan asked if they could come by to see me. I said okay. They told me that they had a surprise for me. I gave them my address and when they came they had someone with them – a little girl. I could not believe when they told me that she was their daughter. They stayed for a good hour, and then they had to go. I haven't heard from them since.

Let Go

Fly! Fly! Up to the sky.
Spread your wings so you can soar high.
It's time to fly away from this world to another place, where you can be you.
This world doesn't need you now.
You did what you could do.
But now you are through.
Let the wind carry you away.
Let the sun take you today.
It's time to get away.
For it's time to start a new day.

CHAPTER 5

After Nicholas died, I started to like Derek. I never thought we would ever become good friends. That year, we started 9th grade. This girl named Sharlene who was in a wheelchair – oh God; I never knew how much trouble she would cause me. Sharlene and I never got along that year and throughout high school.

We would always make fun of each other. Derek was the best at teasing. No one would pick on him that much. Sometimes the other kids would try to tease him, but they had no luck. I was the only one who would give him a fight. When I gave him a run for his money, he would make fun of my speech and that would always shut me up. Since my speech was slurred, everybody would make fun of my speech and my teeth. My teeth were yellow, so they called me sunshine mouth.

Like I said before, we used to pick on each other about things that we were unable to do, or about things that would hurt us. We knew that Sharlene could not read. One day when she went out of the room everybody dared me to make fun of her on her reading. I said okay. The deal was when Sharlene came back into the classroom; Derek was supposed to begin to pick on me. We knew that Sharlene would join him. When she started picking on me, I was supposed to start picking on her. When she came back we waited until Ms. Rortheberth stepped out of the room. When Derek started on me as we expected, Sharlene started on me. I started to tease her about her reading. She would try to come back at me with everything she had. She would try to say things that would get me mad. She would try to tease me about my speech and my teeth. I'd come back at her with her reading and weight. She couldn't get to me, so I kept on teasing her. Something happened that we didn't expect. She broke down crying. When she started to cry, everybody felt sorry for her and started in on me.

I could not handle all of them at once. I tried. Derek saw that I was getting on him for telling me to tease Sharlene. I was able to give him a hard time when it was one on one. When I had to deal with all of them at the same time and I couldn't, they made me feel so bad that I was about to cry. Thank God Ms. Rotheberth walked in and they stopped. I was so happy that Ms. Rotheberth came, because I could not take it anymore. I knew I was about to give up and cry. Back then you had to try to make them cry before they made you cry. That was the way we got respect. We would talk about anything and anybody. We talked about anything, from our

handicaps, looks, what we could not do, to our mothers and fathers. We would not talk about Vinney's mother because his mother had died.

Everybody liked to pick on Vinny the most because it was so easy to get him upset. We would say that he was gay because he was feminine looking. Vinny and Armondo were good friends since they were young. We knew that, but Vinny was always all over him. Armondo would tell him sometimes to stop hanging all over him because of us. Armondo never would have told him that if we had not called Vinny gay. Little did they know that I was the one who was gay. If they only knew that I had a crush on Vinny and another guy in our class named Robert. I liked Robert more than Vinny because Robert had a big butt. When he walked his butt would shake. I used to walk behind him so I could watch his butt. Sometimes when we were in the bathroom, I would try to take a peak or look at him. I was always scared that I would get caught looking, so I tried to control myself.

We did not care who we told off. We would even sometimes pick on Ms. Rortheberth. We used to do things behind her back when she was writing on the blackboard. One day, she caught me giving her the bird (the middle finger). I thought she was going to call my mother. All she did was take me out of the classroom into the hall and give me a warning. She told me that if she ever caught me doing something like that again she would call my mother. I still did things behind her back, but I was real careful not to get caught.

The time came for us to take our picture for the yearbook and pick the high school that we wanted to go to. Derek wanted to go to his brother's school in Brooklyn. I wanted to go to the same high school that Derek was going to. I did not pass the test, and neither did Derek. We ended up going to Frances Lewis High School along with Vinny, Sharlene, and Robert.

Two weeks before we graduated, we got our yearbook, autograph book, and the graduation tickets to give to the people we wanted to attend. We signed each other's autograph books. Some of us needed more graduation tickets. There were two tickets for each of us. Three people were not going to graduate so Ms. Rortheberth had six extra tickets to give away. There were not enough tickets for everybody who wanted them. I needed three extra tickets because an old friend of the family named Pete showed up three months before graduation. He wanted to go, but I already had invited Irene and Ralph's mother. I had five people who wanted to go – my mother, Ralph, his mother, Irene, and Pete. Derek wanted three tickets and Vinny and Danny wanted tickets too. Ms. Rortheberth told us that she did not have enough tickets. She gave me two tickets and Derek two tickets and so on. I needed three tickets so I waited until I was alone with her. I knew I could sweet-talk her into giving me what I needed. When it was lunchtime everybody went to lunch, but I stayed behind to talk to her. I knew that if I got her alone I could persuade her to give me another ticket. I gave her a sad story and persuaded her to give me the last one. No matter how bad I was, I knew how to play my teachers. I knew when to act up and when to be nice to them.

The big day came, graduation day from junior high. My mother asked my father to give her money to get my clothes for my graduation. With the money my father gave her, and with some of her money, my mother bought me a white suit and shoes. On graduation morning, Irene and Ralph's mother came early. Pete met us at the school. When Irene and Ralph's mother came, Ralph went and got a cab. The cab driver didn't know how to get there, so I had to tell him which

way to go. We had the graduation at Queens College. The ceremony started at ten in the morning, but they asked us to be there at nine. We were a little late.

Each of us had someone who was supposed to push us throughout the graduation ceremony. Ms. Carry was assigned to me. She was my speech teacher. She knew me from when I used to go to UCP when I was younger. When we got there she was waiting for me. She took me where I was assigned to sit. Everybody was already there. Only two people in wheelchairs came late, another guy and myself, but the other guy wasn't from my class.

When the ceremony started, we knew what to expect because we went over it in graduation rehearsal. We had graduation rehearsal every Friday for a month. First the principal would talk, and then there be some speeches, and after the awards they gave out the diplomas. Everything went as planned, but when they called the kids to get their awards something happened that I did not expect. I was talking to Derek about how boring it was when I heard my name being called for one of the science awards. I thought that I was hearing things. I looked at Ms. Carry, who was behind me, and said with a surprised look on my face, "Did I hear right? Did they call me?"

Ms. Carry said yes. Then she grabbed me to bring me up to get the award.

When I went up to get my award, my mother got close to the stage so she could take some pictures. The students who went up to get their awards had to stay on stage until they finished giving out all the awards. They had a student give a speech, and then it was time to get your diploma. The students in special education would be called first. While the student was giving his speech, we had to line up to get ready to go up and get our diplomas.

When the principal called your name you had to take the diploma in your left hand and with the right hand shake his hand. I thought I was going to mess up and drop the diploma, and I almost did. When I went to shake his hand I dropped the diploma, but it fell in my lap.

After everybody received their diploma and the ceremony was over, it was our last chance to say goodbye to our friends and teachers. We talked and took pictures with our friends and family. My mother was so proud of me. I was proud of myself too.

When it was all over, and it was time to go, we went to Ralph's mother's house in Pete's car. Irene didn't go with us. She took a cab home. We went to Ralph's mother's house for an hour. Then Pete took me to see my father. My father couldn't attend the graduation because he had to go to court. After that day I only saw Pete two more times. He moved and I haven't heard from him since.

CHAPTER 6

Not much happened that summer that I can remember. When school started, I was a little nervous about entering high school. I didn't think I was ready for high school. I couldn't read all that well, but I made it. It wasn't easy – not because of the schoolwork, but because of the competition between Sharlene and me over Derek.

On the first day, I was so scared. I didn't know what to expect. When I got off the bus, there were aides waiting for us to help us get around. There were three aides to help us – two women, Tina and Jane, and a man named Pete for the boys. Pete came up to me and asked if my name was Carmelo. When I told him yes, he told me that he knew me from United Cerebral Palsy, my first school. I didn't have any idea that he would be a big part of my independence.

I knew that high school was going to be different, but it was a lot different than I thought. Throughout my school years I basically had all my classes in one room, and always with the same kids. In high school I had to get used to going to different classes with different students. I had a few classes with some of my old classmates from Junior High School.

As the year went by and I got used to the classes and the routine, I made friends and enemies. It took us like two months to start making fun of each other. The competition was mainly between Sharlene and me over Derek. That was the hardest part of school for me. Sharlene liked Derek and wanted him to herself. Anybody who wanted to be close to Derek was her enemy. When she saw that I was getting close with Derek she didn't like that, so I became her number one enemy.

As the year went by, the name-calling and fights started. I had to deal with the problems in school, as well as at home. I thanked God I had Pete to help me get through. I got close to Pete. I was able to talk to him about what was going on at home. At this point my mother hadn't stopped drinking yet. I was still going crazy at home with my mother and Ralph fighting when they got drunk. It felt good to have someone I could trust to talk to about what was going on at home. I used to have to hold it in because I didn't want anyone to know how I lived. I knew if they had found out about my life at home, they would have another thing to pick on me about. It was enough that they used to make fun of the way I talked. I didn't need to give them any more ammunition.

Pete sometimes saw that there was something wrong with me. Sometimes I went to school looking tired and upset. He would ask me if there was something wrong at home. At first I was afraid to confide in him because of what happened to me with the midget Jeff. So I would tell him that nothing was wrong, but he knew that I was lying. He would always ask me if I needed to talk to someone. I learned to trust him, and I was able to tell him what was going on at home. It was good to be able to talk to someone about what was going on at home. I felt like I didn't have to deal with my mother and Ralph's fighting alone. I finally had someone to talk to.

One day Pete told me that he thought it would help if I talked to a counselor. At first I said no, because I was afraid that my mother would get in trouble. Pete convinced me that nothing was going to happen to my mother, so I agreed to talk to one. He introduced me to Ms. King, a counselor in school. I used to go to her once a week. I enjoyed seeing her. She helped me deal with the problems at home. At one point, Ms. King sent an investigator to my house to see what was going on. That's when my mother found out that I was talking about what was going on at home. My mother got upset but she didn't get in trouble with the authorities because the investigator didn't find anything wrong at home.

It was going on my eighteenth birthday, and I wanted to change my SSI check to my name so I could cash it and feel like I had more control over my life. I asked Ms. King if there was a way that I could change it. She helped me get my checks changed to my name. When I told my mother that I was changing my checks to my name, she was upset and didn't understand why I was doing it. She thought that I was doing it because I didn't trust her with my money. I told her that wasn't the case. I just wanted to have my own money. She didn't like it, but I did it anyway. She probably thought that because I was changing the SSI check to my name that I was not going to contribute to the bills. My SSI check paid for the rent and welfare paid the other household expenses. Ralph contributed to the expenses as well, but my SSI check paid most of the bills. At that point I started to take charge of my life. I guess my mother didn't like the idea of her baby growing up.

Since that day, my mother saw that I was growing up. She didn't like it all that much, especially when I told her that I was thinking about moving out on my own. I used to think about living on my own, but I never thought I could because I was disabled. I told Pete that I wished I could get my own place. That's when he told me that I could if I really wanted to. I didn't believe him. I thought he was joking with me, but he told me that he knew other disabled people who were able to move out on their own.

"But how can I live on my own? There are things that I can't even do. Like cooking, cleaning and things like that."

"They have people who come to the house to help you."

"But I can't afford to live on my own and pay rent, light, gas, and things like that," I told him. That's when he told me about New York City Housing. He got me an application for the projects. He helped me fill it out like a month after I turned eighteen. It took almost three years for me to get my apartment.

When I told my mother what I was doing, she didn't believe me. She told me that I couldn't live on my own. When I saw that she didn't like me talking about it, I didn't mention it to her anymore. Pete told me that it was going to take a few years before I would get in, so I forgot about it. Every time my mother and Ralph used to get drunk and fight, I used to pray that I

would get the place. Anyway, I had other things to go through – like school, fitting in, and making friends. As time went by I made friends and got used to the environment. The first year went by okay. I had some difficulties, but it wasn't as bad as the second year. It was like three months before the end of the year, when we had a week off before we started our last quarter of the year. They fucked up and changed busses on us. I had to stay out of school for like two weeks until they got me on a bus run. The kids whose parents had cars were able to get to school. I was fucked. I didn't have any way to get to school, so I had to stay home, which I hated with all my heart. Pete came to see me twice to let me know what was going on. After two weeks, they straightened it out and got me back in school.

The day came for me to go back to school. The bus picked me up first because I was the farthest from the school. I was surprised when I saw that the last two kids we picked up were Derek and Sharlene. Derek and Sharlene were on the bus nearly three weeks before me, so they knew the bus driver and matron better than me. Since I was on the bus with Derek and Sharlene, the competition got worse.

By being the first one on the bus, I learned how to get to the other kids' houses. I made sure that I remembered how to get to Derek's house. One warm weekend in June, my father came to see me. My cousin Elvin was over that weekend. My father was about to leave.

As he was leaving I turned to Elvin and said, "Elvin why don't I ask Daddy to take us to Derek's house?" (Elvin and I would talk about going to Derek's.)

Elvin said okay. I asked my father and he said okay, he would take us. So Elvin and I got in my father's car, and I showed him the way to get there. When we got like three blocks from Derek's house, I told my father to drop us off. If Derek was outside I didn't want Derek to see me getting out of my father's car. I didn't want him to see that I was lying about my father being rich.

When we got there, we had to wait for Derek to get ready. He didn't know that we were coming over. When Derek came out we hung around his neighborhood until it got dark. That's when his mother invited us in. We told her that it was getting late and we had a long way home. She told us that she would drive us home if we wanted to stay longer. We said okay and went in. We went down to his basement. We hung out, heard music and joked around until about 11p.m. that's when Derek's mother came down and told us that it was getting late and we should get ready to leave soon. We stayed like a half-hour longer, and then Derek's mother took us home.

When Monday came, Derek and Sharlene were on the bus, and I wanted to get her jealous. I told Derek that I had fun that Saturday. I saw her look like she wanted to kill me and I loved it. The rest of the year, I had my ups and downs in school and at home. The last day of school took the cake. We went to our classes just to sign out of each class. Instead of going to the last class, everybody went to the lunchroom. Sharlene was the last one to come down. Once again, I fell for Derek's trap. Before she came down everyone dared me to make fun of her again. When she came down they made her start with me. Then I started making fun of her and made her cry. The other kids felt sorry for her and started ranking on me. Derek was the main one who picked on me. I tried to rank back on him. I tried but he was too good for me, and I couldn't take it anymore. I knew I was about to break down and cry. I saw Pete coming in. I went to him and asked him to take me out of the lunchroom. When we left, I calmed down and stayed with Pete until it was time to go home.

The weekend before school ended, my cousin Elvin came to stay with us, so by the time I got home I had calmed down. Elvin and I went out. We were walking around when I realized that we were near my childhood girlfriend Martha's house. We ended up knocking on her door. Martha wasn't home when we got there so we ended up hanging out with her sisters. We were still there when she got home. She gave me a kiss and asked what I was doing there. I just told her that we were walking around and I thought I'd go by and say hello. We stayed there like until 11 pm, and then Elvin and I went home. I never saw her again. The last I heard she was married and was pregnant. Still to this day I think about her every now and then. I think there will always be a part of me that will always have feelings for her.

By that summer, Carmen was living with a guy named Peewee at his mother's house. Carmen got pregnant with my nephew Andres. He was born September 17, 1983. Carmen would sometimes pick me up to take me to spend some time with her and my nephew on the weekends. Later that year they moved in with their friends Eddie and Nelsy who had a son of their own. Carmen and Peewee had another son named Manuel about eighteen months later. I only saw him five times when he was a baby. I really don't know why, but they gave him up to his godparents. I haven't seen him since. Carmen hadn't seen him either, until April of 1993, when she went to meet him for the first time since she had given him up. I had never met him in person, but I talked to him twice over the phone and I have him on videotape. I have two pictures of him also. I hope one of these days I will meet and get to know him.

When school started, I met my future godmother Pat. She was my bus matron at the time. We got to talking and ended up becoming good friends. One day she invited me over her house to meet her mother, sister, and best friend Whitey. Whitey became my computer dealer or computer connection. She's the one I go to when I have a computer problem. The funny thing is that I'm the one who got her into computers.

As time went by, I kept going over to Pat's house. I began to feel like a part of the family. I asked Pat if she would baptize me. She said yes, but we never really got the chance to do it. I was baptized when I was younger, but I really didn't know who my godparents were. I became close to Pat, so I called her my godmother anyway because she's always there when I need her. I ended up spending two weeks with her that summer. Two weeks before my last year of high school started, I called Pete to see how he was. He asked if I had heard from Derek. I told him no and that I felt like we were not friends anymore because of what happened on the last day of school. Not in so many words, Pete told me to cut the shit and call Derek. Friends like us should not let anything break up our friendship. I called him and we talked and patched things up between us.

When school started, Derek came in with a motorized wheelchair. Because of the motorized wheelchair, everyone thought that Derek was cool. I asked my hospital like a month before school started if I could get a motorized wheelchair. October that year I got my first chair. It took until January for the hospital to let me take the wheelchair home, because I was being trained on how to use it twice a month. I had to leave the wheelchair in school because where I lived wasn't wheelchair accessible.

After I got my wheelchair, my friendship with Derek became closer. We also became the big shots of the school. People would get out of our way when we came down the hall. Derek and I would get in trouble sometimes because we would run people over with our chairs. I was the

one who got in trouble the most, because I was the one who ran people over most of the time. One day I got in trouble because I ran into a girl and sprained her ankle. They warned me that if I kept it up they would take the wheelchair away from me.

That reminds me of an incident where they took the wheelchair away from me. They did not let me use it until my mother came to school. There was a physical therapist that came once a week to give therapy to us. I used to curse a lot in school (that's how I got my reputation) until I got into a fight with the therapist. He was giving me therapy and he hurt me, so I cursed. He told me if I cursed again he was really going to hurt me, so I cursed again. He pulled my leg really hard and made me scream, so I cursed his ass out. He left me on the table and told me to get out of the room. I asked him to help me onto the wheelchair, and I would leave.

He told me, "No! Get down from the table by yourself."

I got down from the table and into my wheelchair by myself and left the room. I had forgotten my book-bag, so I knocked on the door and asked him for it.

He opened the door and told me, "No! I'm not giving you your book-bag," and he slammed the door in my face.

I got mad and started to kick and punch the door. I screamed at him, "Give me back my fucking book-bag!"

He opened the door, disengaged my wheelchair by pulling a lever behind the chair to make the chair manual, and pushed me away. I went to get out of the wheelchair and this girl tried to stop me. I punched her in the arm and got out of the wheelchair. Another friend came and tried to stop me (he was in a manual wheelchair). I grabbed his wheelchair and pushed him away. In the process his wheelchair almost tipped over. A teacher came from out of nowhere and picked me up by the waist. I was going to scratch him to get him to release me, but I calmed down. They took the wheelchair away and would not return it until my mother came to school to get it. When my mother came to school they told her that I would have to calm down and learn to control my temper. Otherwise I would be suspended next time.

I met Eugene (my other best friend) in my senior year of high school. Derek and I started becoming distant because of Sharlene, so I started to hang out with Eugene. Throughout that year, Eugene and I did everything together. I would sleep over his house and go to church with him and his family. Eugene was the only one I let stay over my house. We had our hard times because Derek and Sharlene interfered in our friendship. Our friendship survived and grew stronger when we graduated.

One day we were in the school cafeteria insulting each other verbally. Derek, Eugene, and I were one side of this long table, and Sharlene was on the other side. That day we had gotten our graduation pictures back. Sharlene was showing Derek her graduation picture when I started to laugh. She asked me why I was laughing, so I told her that she looked fat in the picture. She got upset and we started to argue. At one point during the argument she called my mother a Puerto Rican bitch. Derek knew that because of that comment there was going to be trouble. He tried to stop me, but I turned the wheelchair on so fast, Derek didn't have a chance to stop me. Before he knew, I was on the other side of the table. I rammed my wheelchair into hers and made her wheelchair spin. I ended up behind her, so I punched her in the head twice. She was trying to hit me back, but she couldn't because I was behind her. She looked like a pretzel having a seizure. Pete walked in the lunchroom as I was punching Sharlene. He came towards us,

disengaged my wheelchair and pulled me away. Sharlene turned around and we kept on cursing at each other. Pete took me upstairs to the Dean's office. I was going to get suspended, but luckily Derek and Eugene came up to the office and explained that Sharlene had made some racial remarks against my mother. The Dean excused me. As I was leaving the Dean's office, I bumped into Sharlene in the hallway. We started to argue again. Eugene grabbed me and told me to stop before the Dean came out of his office and expelled me.

That same year I cursed out the Vice Principal, not even knowing that he was the Vice Principal. As I mentioned in the past, I was known for my mouth and not backing down to anyone. One day the Vice Principal wanted to see if the rumor about me was true. I was making a phone call on the pay phone in school.

He came up to me and said, "You have to get off the phone."

"What are you talking about? It's the end of the day," I replied.

"You cannot use the phone."

"What do you mean I cannot use the phone?" I said sarcastically.

"Only white people can use the phone," he answered.

"What the fuck are you talking about, you white asshole!" I said as I was slamming the phone down.

"Like I said, only white people can use the phone. No Puerto Rican people are allowed to use the phone," he said with a smirk on his face.

As I was about to lose my head, Eugene and Derek came and pulled me away.

"Do you know who you just cursed out?" Derek asked

"I don't give a fuck who that motherfucker was."

"Well you better care because you just cursed out the Vice Principal," Eugene said.

"Oh shit," I said. Then I went to the Vice Principal's office with Pete to try to apologize. The Vice Principal said that it was all right. He told me that he wanted to see if what he heard about me was true. He was the one who ended up apologizing to me.

On February of that year, my father had passed away from a drug overdose, or at least that's what I was told. At first I didn't react, and it wasn't until I went to bed that it hit me. In the middle of the night, I started to cry when the spirit of my father came to me. When I saw him, his spirit was so friendly that it didn't frighten me. My father didn't speak to me; I just felt a warm presence in the room. The death of my father meant that he wasn't going to see his son graduate.

When graduation time was near, everyone had to pay senior dues for their graduation gown and yearbook. I didn't have the money, so Pete spoke to the Vice Principal for me and the Vice Principal called me in the office and gave me my graduation gown and yearbook as a going away present. Thank God that I graduated that year without getting suspended.

I really didn't want to graduate because that would have meant having to stay home. That was a year of change for me. I was going through hard times at home. I kept hoping and praying that the application for the New York City Housing apartment that I applied for would come through. I had no way out of the hell I was living in. At this point my mother had stopped drinking, but Ralph continued. Here I was, a 20-year-old man living a sheltered life. I had one real friend, no social life, and I was living with an alcoholic. I got fed up and decided that I was going to do everything in my power to speed up the application for the apartment. I called everybody and their mother. I called The New York Housing Authority every other day to see

what was going on with my application. I called politicians. I called congressmen. I finally got a call from The Housing Authority to come down for an interview. Miriam, my oldest sister, was living and working with this couple that was disabled. She knew that I had applied for an apartment. I told her that housing had scheduled me for an interview, but I had no one to take me there. She took me to the interview, and the interview went fine. The only thing I had to do in order to get the apartment was to get a Personal Care Attendant. I managed to get a Personal Care Attendant for 4 hours a day. My mother was not happy about me moving, but she knew that it was my life. She knew it was time to let me grow up. I could understand how she felt. She took care of me all of those years and now her youngest was about to leave home.

Shortly after I got the Personal Care Attendant, Housing called me to show me an apartment. The apartment that they had available was in Long Island City. I had to pay Eugene's father 40 dollars to take me to see the apartment. I didn't have anyone else who could take me. They showed me an apartment that I liked. The only problem was that you had to go up two steps to get into the apartment. I accepted the apartment because I was unhappy living where I was. I wanted to get away from the situation I was living in. It took them two months to get the apartment ready for me to move in.

They called me on October 19, 1988 (Wednesday) to go pick up the keys to the apartment. Eugene took the day off from school to go with me. Eugene and I took three buses in order for us to pick the keys up. I got to the management office late, so we had to wait for the manager to come back from lunch. When he got back, I signed the lease. He gave us the keys and we went to my new apartment. When I put the keys in the door and opened the door, which was when I realized that my life was about to change. Later on we went shopping for some things that I needed for the apartment. Eugene and I put the things away and talked about how good it was that I was finally on my own. We even talked about the possibility of us moving in together some day and becoming roommates. We ended up getting back to Eugene's house at 8 p.m.

Eugene, his father, and a friend helped me move the few things that I had on that Sunday. The first night I slept on the floor with a little junky radio, my clothes, and my belongings. I didn't get much sleep that night because I was shitting bricks. It was my first night being alone and every noise and sound that I heard made me nervous. Since I was on the first floor and my apartment was near the front door, I would hear when people came in and out of the building. That frightened me. I put the radio on real loud so that I could drown out the noise, and try to fall asleep.

My Personal Care Attendant

I hate you, so I curse at you.
Day after day I want to strangle you, but I can't.
Because I can't put my hands around your neck.
Even though you try your best to help me, I still want to hurt you.
I ask myself, why do I feel this way?
Is it because I know that I can't live without you?
Or is it because I know you can live without me?
Everyday you come in and tell me that your life is going well.
That makes me want to send you to hell.
So you tell me that I am not well.
I ask you to see it from my point of view,
So you try to, but you can't, 'Cause you're not in my shoes.
Please tell me why I hate you?
I know. It's because I need you.

CHAPTER 7

The next day came, and along with that day came a new life for me. The first month was very hard for me because I was used to having someone with me all the time. When I was living with my mother, I only had four hours of home care, because my mother was with me. They told me that once I moved and I was on my own, I would be able to get more help. When I moved, the Personal Care Attendant agency that was assigned to me when I was living with my mother only gave me a week's service. They were in the process of switching me to the agency that was assigned to cover the location where I had moved. I had to make the best of the situation until the paperwork came through. It took about two weeks for the new agency to take over. Thank God that an old friend of the family named Joe came by one day and ended up staying with me until I switched agencies. The new agency approved a 12-hour schedule for me. Having Joe stay with me helped me a lot, but in a way it also hurt me. I moved so that I could live alone, and I was only alone for a week when Joe moved in. That March was my twenty-first birthday. I had a house warming together with a birthday party. I invited my family, and people from my high school, including Eugene, Derek, Pete, Whitey, Pat and Pat's family.

That night Derek and his cousin Kareen slept over. We ended up talking the whole night and part of the next day. It felt good having Derek over. All the problems that I went through with Derek in the past were worthwhile, because those problems brought us closer together. We became really good friends. When he moved to Virginia, it broke my heart. The week before he moved, I spent a lot of time with him and his family. The day before he moved I slept over his house for the first time. I had bought myself a chain with a letter "C" pendant. I ended up giving him the pendant because his last name was Copeland, even though he already had one. As I saw his moving truck driving away I thought our friendship was over, but luckily for me we kept in touch. I was able to go to visit him. I spent two weeks with him. Those two weeks we connected. We talked about school and what we went through in the past. He told me that Sharlene told him that she thought that I was gay because I was always around him. I just laughed and said to myself, "Little does he know that she was right." But that was not the reason that I was always around him. I didn't see Derek in that way. Our friendship became similar to the friendship that I had with Nicholas. That was what I was trying for all those years in High School.

The day I left Virginia, little did I know that it would be the last time I would see Derek. We kept in touch like once or twice a week. I called one day and his brother told me that Derek was in the hospital because his lungs had collapsed. This happens fairly often in certain cases of Muscular Dystrophy. I didn't know what to say or what to do. I just prayed to God and fasted for one day. He ended up dying a month later on February 7, 1992. I had called to see how Derek was doing, and his mother told me that he died that morning. I felt so bad that I didn't want to do anything for three days. His mother sent me a box with some of his things, such as a pendant, some clothing, and a few other things. A few months after Derek died, Eugene died from sickle cell anemia.

Five months after my twenty-first birthday party, my brother Nelson was having problems with his girlfriend, so he ended up moving in with me. He moved his bedroom set into my apartment. The bedroom set had a queen size bed, a dresser, and a closet. Only his bed would fit in the bedroom because I had my twin size hospital bed in there. We had to put the closet and the dresser in the living room because it would not fit in the bedroom. It was fun having my brother live with me. When my brother was off from work, we would go out and do things together like go to the movies and take walks in the park. We got along most of the time, but there were times when we would get into arguments. He would throw in my face that he had to quit school and get a job in order to help support the family when we were young. I had to remind him that I also supported the family. My S.S.I. check was spent on the household expenses as well.

My mother and her boyfriend Ralph moved in with me. My mother and Ralph had lost their apartment after I moved out on my own. It became difficult for my mother and Ralph to pay the bills because they had a limited income. As a result, they got evicted. They had nowhere else to go so I told them they could move in with me. My brother Nelson moved out a month after. He ended up getting an apartment with my older sister, Miriam.

Here I was back in the same boat that I was in six months ago. I thought they were only going to stay with me a month, two, or three tops, but they ended up staying almost six years. As I told you, I had a three-room apartment, so this time I took the bedroom and my mother and Ralph stayed in the living room. My bedroom became my apartment, because I stayed in my room most of the time. There were times when I went in the living room and hung out with my mother and Ralph, but I felt uncomfortable so I would go back in my room. In the beginning everything was fine. I realized that I was not quite ready to be on my own. But after a year, I started getting a little tired of the situation. At least it wasn't too difficult because my mother had stopped drinking, but Ralph continued to drink. Throughout the years Ralph and I argued because he drank too much, and he wasn't making any effort to find them an apartment. I was getting sick and tired of the fights they would have in my house.

It was hard for me to have them living with me because I was also coming to terms with the fact that I was gay. It wasn't until I met Anthony (who is now my best friend, "my twisted sister," who has Muscular Dystrophy) that I started to feel comfortable being gay. At first, I didn't want to admit that I was gay. I had known that I was gay at a very young age, but I was afraid and ashamed to admit it. I had heard family members talk about how it's wrong to be gay and that being gay was a sin against God, and that all gay people would end up in hell. My father beat his brother up because he found out that his brother was gay. Here I am, a disabled person

dealing with the fact that a lot of people don't really accept disabled people. So imagine being gay and disabled. I knew how it was growing up disabled, and how people criticized me because of it. I didn't want to give them something else to criticize. Imagine growing up knowing that you are attracted to someone, or thinking that you are in love with someone and having to hide it. As I mentioned before, I was attracted to boys in school, but I couldn't show it. I learned to lie to myself. I tried to act straight and become straight. There were times that I thought about killing myself because the pain of having to hide my feelings was so strong, but it would have been a sin to commit suicide. I didn't know what to do. When I saw a guy that I was attracted to, it would eat me up inside not being able to tell him. It would have been so much easier to deal with if I had someone to confide in. The one time that I did confide in someone that I was attracted to boys, I ended up being molested. So how could I admit to my family that I was gay?

I felt as though I was the only gay disabled person in the world, until I went to La Guardia Community College in September 1991. Then I found out that I wasn't.

When I met Anthony, he was giving out fliers for a gay club that he was starting. When I showed up at the club, Anthony could not figure out why I was there. He had no idea that I was gay. I kept going to the club, so of course Anthony figured out that I was gay. We started to become good friends, and I started to develop a crush on him. I sent him flowers and finally got the courage to ask him out, but he turned me down. Thank God he did, because after I got to know him a little better I realized that we weren't compatible. We probably would have ended up killing each other as lovers. As friends, we became like sisters. More like twisted sisters.

We had no idea how far our friendship would take us. We were there for each other through very difficult times. One of the most difficult times was when we admitted to our families that we were gay. I was the first one to come out. The first person I told that I was gay was Joanie, my brother Nelson's girlfriend. (Nelson and Irene had separated.) Joanie was very supportive and told me not to hide it anymore. Then I told Irene's sister Carla. When I told Carla she was very supportive. Carla told me that I should tell Irene. It was such a relief to admit to someone in the family that I was gay.

The break-up between my brother and Irene caused a feud between our families. Irene left New York and moved with my nieces to Florida. Irene and I were very close. I was the only person in the family that she trusted and stayed in touch with when she moved. My family never liked the idea that Irene and I were so close. My family wanted me to take sides because my brother Nelson and Irene had separated. I never took sides. I knew that if I had taken sides I would probably never see my nieces again. Irene got married to a guy named Louis. Irene had two more children from her marriage to Louis. Their names were Samantha and Louis Junior. Irene asked me to be Louis Junior's Godfather.

It was Christmas and I was going to visit Irene in Florida. I was talking to Carla and told her that I wanted to tell Irene that I was gay before I went to Florida. I was afraid of how Irene would react, because Irene had her two seventeen-year old twin brothers-in-law staying with her. I thought that if her brothers-in-law found out that I was gay, it would make everybody uncomfortable. Carla suggested that I make a three-way call to Irene, and she would be on the other line in case I needed support. Irene was surprised, but she understood. She told me that it didn't change our relationship or her feelings towards me. We were more like brother and sister than ex-in-laws.

When I finally got to Florida, Irene convinced me to tell my mother that I was gay. So on December 26, 1991, I gave my mother a Christmas present that she would never forget. I remember that day as if it were yesterday. Irene called my mother and told my mother that I needed to speak to her about something.

When I got on the phone, I said, "Hi Mom, how are you doing?"

"Everything is fine over here, how about over there?" my mother asked.

"Everything is fine. There is something that I need to tell you, but I don't know how you are going to react."

"You can tell me anything; don't be afraid."

"Hum."

"Go ahead Carmelo, tell me what you are going to tell me. Don't be afraid," my mother said.

Irene was on the other line listening and she said, "Go ahead, Carmelo. Tell her."

"Okay. Mom, I'm gay," I said in a panicky tone.

"What do you mean you're gay?"

"Yeah Mom, I'm gay."

"What do you mean you're gay? You can't be gay, you're just confused."

"I'm not confused, Mom."

"God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve," she said in an upset tone of voice.

Why is it that everyone says that phrase when you tell someone you're gay? I think 80% of the gay population has had that phrase said to them at some time.

"Mom, God made Adam and Eve and Steve, Mary, Jack and Jill!" I answered my mother in a strong tone. She kept on and on and on about how I shouldn't be gay, how I couldn't be gay, and that I'm confused. If I was gay, my father's side of the family passed it on to me, because my sister Carmen had admitted she was a lesbian a few months before. (Carmen and I have the same father.) On top of that, one of my uncles (my father's brother) had a sex change. He is no longer my uncle; he is now my aunt. We hung up the phone, and my mother called my brother Nelson. He called me shortly after, telling me that my mother had called him.

During the conversation he said, "So, I heard you like getting it up the ass?"

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I got upset.

"Yeah," I said sarcastically.

We ended up getting into an argument. He wanted to know what the hell was going on. First my sister Carmen admitted she was gay, and now I was admitting that I was gay. I don't understand why Nelson was so upset. He still had a brother and sister. It was just in reverse. We had one gay happy family (on my father's side). They always thought that it might be genetic. I guess it is. If my father were alive he probably would have killed both my sister and me. As I mentioned before, when he found out that his brother was gay, he almost killed his brother. Maybe his first two kids became gay because of what he did to his brother. Who knows, maybe his other three kids Nilsa, Denise and Georgie are gay too. That would be a hoot!

When I went home two weeks later, I was afraid of hearing my mother preach. I really didn't want to go home. I knew living with my mother and Ralph was going to be even more difficult than it was before, now that I was out with my homosexuality. Sometimes Ralph and Nelson would tell me that all I needed was to have sex with a woman. If I did, she would rock my

world and that would cure me of being gay. I couldn't make them understand that it wouldn't have made a difference. They couldn't understand that being gay was not something that I could change. Later on in life, I did have sex with a woman. A female Personal Care Attendant of mine asked me if I ever had sex with a woman, and if not had I ever thought about it? I told her that I never had sex with a female (at least voluntarily), but I had thought about it. She offered to have sex with me if I wanted, so we did. I used to think that maybe Nelson and Ralph were right. If I had sex with a woman it would change the way that I thought and felt, but it didn't. It just confirmed that being gay wasn't something that I could change.

As time went by, my mother learned to accept that I'm gay. Her two youngest children were gay, and I guess she did not want to abandon us. My mother and I are now close. I can even talk to her about the men that I date. I was lucky to have a mother that loved me unconditionally. When some people come out their parent's end up disowning them and never speak to them again. The year that I came out, she even helped me get dressed in drag for Halloween. She loaned me one of her wigs and did my make-up. That Halloween of 1992, the Gay and Lesbian Center had a dance. I had to take a bus to the dance. Ralph had to take me because my motorized wheelchair was broken. On the way there, the bus driver asked Ralph, "Where is she getting off?" Ralph looked at me and started to laugh and told the driver where we were getting off. I would always fantasize about dressing up in drag. I would look at women's clothes and visualize how I would look in them. When I was younger and there was no one around, I would take my sisters' clothes and hold them up to me as I looked in the mirror. I would put a towel on my head and pretend that I had long hair.

Shortly after I came out of the closet, Anthony came out and told his parents that he was gay. I remember the first gay dance that I went to. I went with Anthony. It was Saturday, January 11, 1992. The dance was at the Gay and Lesbian Center. Anthony introduced me to that place. He is responsible for the ramp that was placed in front of the center, which made it wheelchair accessible. Anthony is quite an activist when it comes to disability issues. We were kind of nervous at first, but when I got on that dance floor, nothing stopped me. I ended up dancing with about 15 different guys. I didn't get any phone numbers, but I still had fun. I was having so much fun that before I knew it the dance was over.

The dance was over at 1 am. It took me almost 2 hours to get home. At the time I was living in Queens, and the dance was in Manhattan. I had to take two buses, cross over the 59 Street Bridge, and walk one mile to get home. It would have been so much easier for me to get home if the subway were accessible. I could have been home in ½ hour.

I met a guy named Manny at the dance. We started dating, and I had my first open gay fling with him. We had sex twice during the three weeks that we dated. The first time we had sex I had to throw my mother and Ralph out of the house. I rarely had the place to myself, and I needed to have some privacy. I asked them to go see a movie, and they did.

Having openly gay sex was such a new experience for me that I wanted to make a videotape of it. I asked Manny if he would mind me taping us. He said that he didn't mind, so I did. The first thing we did is take a shower together. That was one of my many fantasies come true. I always wanted to take a shower with a man. Then we went in the bedroom and I put on the video camera. We started giving each other blowjobs, kissing, jerking each other off, and just caressing each other. The second time that we had sex at my apartment in Queens I wanted to

have anal sex. I didn't have the courage to go through with it, so we did the same things that we did the first time. After we had sex Manny gave me the bad news that he was moving out of New York. I never saw him again until I moved to Manhattan a few years later. He had written me a letter at my old address, and it was forwarded to me. When I received the letter I noticed that he had moved to Washington D.C. I called him and he told me that he comes to New York every now and then to visit. We saw each other a few times after that, and we remained friends.

At other dances I met other guys who came on to me. Some I found attractive, and some I didn't. There was this one guy named Jermaine who fell madly in love with me. I really didn't like him in a sexual way. I really didn't find him to be my type, but boy was I his. Every time I went to the dance and he was there he would come on to me. Once I was horny and I gave in. I let him give me a blowjob in an alley. I was so worried that someone might catch us that I couldn't let myself enjoy it fully. That night he asked me if he could sleep over my place, and I let him. According to him, he didn't have anywhere to sleep. We went in my room and locked the door, because my mother was in the living room. He started making a pass at me, so I gave in again. I figured, why not? When you're disabled and an opportunity like that comes along, you can't pass it up. You never know when the opportunity is going to come again. I had sex with him a few times, mostly when I moved to Manhattan. He developed a huge crush on me. Whenever I hear from him he still claims that he wants me to be his, to marry him. Why is it that the ones that you really don't care for want you? The ones that you do want don't even know that you are alive. Having sex is fun, but what I really wanted was to have a relationship with someone.

Another time at one of the dances, a sixteen-year old that was hot came on to me. I could not believe my eyes. I thought that I was dreaming. We ended up leaving the dance floor and going into a room to talk. As we were talking he kissed me. I was so shocked that he was kissing me, that I kissed him back with my eyes wide open. I was praying that this moment would not end, but of course, it did. We ended up exchanging phone numbers and we talked on the phone a few times. He wanted to visit me, but since my mother was living with me I said no. Of course all dreams comes to an end and we lost contact with each other.

Anthony and me tried a lot of different ways to meet guys, but being gay and disabled is like being a Chihuahua in a Great Dane's world. We tried different dating services. One in particular was Brunch Buddies. Anthony found out about it in a gay newspaper. Anthony was the first one to join Brunch Buddies. At Brunch Buddies you have to pay \$150 for three matches. This is how it works: They have a book with photographs and you pick the person you would like to meet. They contact the person you want to meet and tell them about you. If the person agrees, Brunch Buddies calls you back to let you know when you can call them. It is only considered a match if after you have spoken with that person, you actually meet. We both ended up getting some of our money back.

I met two people via Brunch Buddies. One was a guy named Jim. He lived a few blocks away from me. After we spoke on the phone, we agreed to meet at his house. When I got to his house, I saw that his building was not wheelchair accessible. He offered to carry me up. I didn't want him to carry me up the stairs because I knew it would discourage him from wanting to date me, but I was in a catch 22. I didn't want him to carry me up because I was afraid he would get turned off by it, but if he didn't carry me up I would not get to know him, and he would not get to know me. We did nothing but talk for two hours. I wanted to have sex with him but evidently I

wasn't his type. When it was time for me to leave he had to carry me back down. I guess the carrying was too much for him because I never heard from him again.

The other guy I met was named Philip. It was his match because he was the one that picked me. Unfortunately he wasn't my type, so we remained friends. Philip came to my house a few times and brought some of his friends over. There was a friend I really liked, but he had a boyfriend. They always give in because even though Philip's friend had a boyfriend, that didn't stop me from taking a bite from the apple. One day he called me to ask if he could come over. He came over and asked me if I had any porno movies, so I locked my bedroom door (because my mother was in the other room) and put one on. There was a guy in the movie that was uncut. He made a comment that he liked uncut dicks, so I told him fooling around that I was uncut. He told me to let him see. I thought that he was joking, but he wasn't. When I showed him my cock he took hold of it and started to jerk it. We ended up on my bed doing the 69. I was scared because I didn't know if he was HIV positive, so I didn't get into it the way that I wanted to. We ended up coming, talked for about ten minutes, and then I walked him to the train.

We bumped into each other a few times, but it took almost six years and my move to Manhattan before we had another fling. One day he called asking if he could come over my house to see me.

I said, "Wouldn't it be better if I went to your house, being that you don't like this neighborhood?"

We agreed that I would go to his place in Queens. It took three buses and three hours to get to his house. It would have been a lot quicker if the subway were accessible. When I got there, his boyfriend was there, but he was getting ready to go to work. I bet that his boyfriend didn't think twice about us having an affair, because I'm disabled. Gay men don't see disabled people as a threat. When he left we sat on the couch and talked for a while. We started kissing and grabbing each other. He finally picked me up and carried me to the bedroom. I was thinking to myself, "Now we're going to get down and dirty." I was lying on the bed on my back and he got on top of me. He started to put my cock in between his butt crack and moving up and down. I suggested that I should put a condom on, but he said I didn't need to. He wasn't going to let me enter him. I ended up penetrating him and I came fast. I felt a little embarrassed, but no big deal.

We went back to the living room and started talking again. Fifteen minutes later, we went at it again. This time when we went in the room, I gave him a massage. He told me that his boyfriend really never pampered him the way that I did. I went into fantasy mode and thought that if I kept on pampering him, he might leave his boyfriend and hook up with me. I kept massaging him until we had sex again. After we had sex I saw that he was tired so I left. I never saw him again. We talked on the phone a few more times. He wanted me to go over his house for another encounter, but he refused to agree to use a condom, so we never got together again. I would not have sex with him again without a condom.

That reminds me of the first HIV test I had. A good friend of mine named Dan took me to get tested. I met him in Manhattan on the Christopher Street pier in June 1991. I was just walking the pier, and I saw this cute white guy sitting down reading. I went up to him and started a conversation, not knowing that he would play a major part in my life. During the conversation, he admitted that he was HIV positive, but that didn't bother me. I knew people who were HIV positive. We exchanged phone numbers, and I thought to myself that he was just like all the other

faggots who would take your number but never call. To my surprise, he proved me wrong by calling me that weekend to ask if I wanted to get together with him. We became really good friends. Of course I developed a big fat crush on him. He was one of the few people who treated me like I wasn't disabled. He knew that I had just come out that year so he introduced me to the gay life. He took me out to gay clubs, invited me to stay with him, and we even marched in the Gay Pride Parade. My electric wheelchair was being fixed, so Dan ended up pushing me for miles so that I could march in the parade. After the parade we went to the pier to watch the fireworks that they give every year. Then we went to a party at the Duplex. It's a gay bar in New York City.

That Halloween, Dan and I dressed up in drag. That was the second time that I had dressed up in drag. Dan and I were going to a party that night, but I went to the Halloween dance at the Center first. Dan came to pick me up after the dance and took me to the party that they were having at his workplace. He was a waiter at a restaurant called Lox Around the Clock. I had the most fun that I ever had in my life. I even drank liquor and smoked marijuana. Dan introduced me to a drink called Sex on the Beach. We were at Dan's job for two hours. While I was there a lady came up to me and asked me what had happened to me, and why I was in a wheelchair. When I told her how I became disabled and that I really didn't mind being in a wheelchair, she got very emotional and started to cry. She told me that I have a lot of courage and that I have a great attitude about life. Then she tried to kiss me. I had been drinking and I was feeling a little tipsy, so part of me wanted to kiss her back. I was surrounded by Dan and his friends, so I didn't.

Around midnight, we went to the house of a friend of Dan's who was giving a party. At first I was uncomfortable for about an hour, but then I felt comfortable because Dan made me feel like I was part of the group. I did stuff that I would never have done, especially when I'm at someone's house for the first time. I am always self-conscious, no matter where I go, but that night was different. I did things that night I can't believe I did. I got out of my wheelchair and I started to dance on the floor. At one point I took Dan's boa from him and started to dance with it. Everybody started to root me on, so Dan picked me up and spun me around. The boa started to hit everybody while Dan was spinning me around. I think I only did what I did because of the drinks that I had earlier, and the many sips I kept taking from Dan's drinks. Then they started smoking and asked me if I wanted some. So I said yes. They gave me 3 shotgun hits. (That's where someone put the joint into his or her mouth backwards and blows the smoke into your mouth while you inhale as much smoke into your mouth as possible.) At this point, I was feeling so good I didn't give a shit what people were thinking. Before we left, I took a picture of me on the floor with the boa Dan had on all night. It was seven o'clock in the morning when the party was over, and Dan took me home.

We went through so much together. I remember a time when I was afraid that I might have gotten Syphilis from Jermaine. I was so scared that I called Dan. He offered to take me to get tested, so I met him the next morning at a clinic near his house. I got tested for syphilis and HIV. I wonder what the nurse was thinking while she was examining me. Here's a disabled guy getting tested for a sexually transmitted disease. I found out that I was negative a week later, and Dan and I went out to celebrate. As time went by, I noticed that Dan was getting weaker. It was getting harder for him to bring me up the stairs to his house. He ended up being admitted to New

York Hospital. I went to visit him twice a week until he was discharged. About a month after his discharge he told me that he was going to move upstate with his family. I never heard from him again until I got the phone call from his mother. He had made out a list of people his mother was to contact upon his death, and I was one of them. I was very surprised when I got her call because I had moved from Queens and had been living in Manhattan for over a month. All my best friends had ended up dying, except for Anthony and Rick. I mention Rick later in the book. I wish that Dan were still alive so that I could tell him how much his friendship meant to me.

Anthony was the reason I moved on my own for the second time. This time I moved to Manhattan. As I mentioned before, I had to go up two steps to get into my apartment in Queens. Anthony heard about a lawsuit that EPVA filed against Housing for not having accessible apartments for the disabled. He got the number to contact them. When I called they told me that they would help me get my apartment accessible. As time went by I was told that my apartment could not be made accessible, but that they would transfer me to an accessible apartment. When I told my mother that I was going to be transferred, she got upset. She wanted to stay in the apartment in Queens. She knew that once I moved to Manhattan, she would have to find her own apartment. She had filled out an application for an apartment with the Housing Authority, but they had her on a waiting list. She asked me to find out if she could stay living in my apartment in Queens. I tried to do everything in my power so that my mother could continue to live in the apartment once I left, but nothing worked. I continued to do everything that I had to do to move into my own apartment because I knew that my mother and Ralph were never going to move out. A few months earlier she had gotten a settlement from a lawsuit that she had won. She had gotten hit by a car and was awarded \$26,000. She gave most of the money away, spent the rest, and did not have enough money to get her own apartment. I knew that my mother and Ralph weren't going to move, so I moved.

About two months before I moved, Anthony and I changed home care agencies because we were not happy with the people the agency sent us. Some of the Personal Care Attendants would be absent constantly, some of them would come every day but would not want to do any work, most of them did not speak English, and some of them were just plain nasty. We heard about an agency named Concepts of Independence, where we could hire the Personal Care Attendants we wanted to work for us. It's so important that we are in charge of hiring whom we want because they play an important role in our life. Without them we would be forced to live a sheltered life. Anthony was the first one to join, and I followed him. I joined two weeks before I moved. I was shown a few apartments that I did not care for. I was willing to take just about anything because I wanted to get out of the situation I was in. I was in Manhattan one day and saw a project in Chelsea, a gay neighborhood I wanted to move into. I called to find out if I could get the apartment in that area and by some miracle it was the next apartment that Housing was going to offer me. I don't know why, but someone upstairs likes me because I usually get what I want 80% of the time.

Before it's too late

When will I find the person that I need to be?
When will I find the life I need to live?
When I look in the mirror I see myself,
and I don't like what I see.
Could I be that person that I see?
That person that I see, just can't be me.
Because he looks so old and worn out.
I ask him "What happened to him?"
He answered. "As time went by People
took and took until my life was drained"
They took and drained the life out of him.
By wanting him to do so much for them.
He told me to be careful and learn from his mistakes
Because there is too much at stake.

CHAPTER 8

On January 25, 1995, Michael, one of my Personal Care Attendants, helped me move, and my new life began. I hired a gay Personal Care Attendant named Richard Lewis (I call him Rick) who had worked for Anthony. He helped me open up to the gay life. Since he lived in the neighborhood, we spent a lot of time together and became good friends. As I mentioned before, gay people create their own family. Anthony became my twisted sister, and Rick became my daughter, and I, his mama. He would spend a lot of his personal time taking me out and showing me a good time. I caught a big crush on him, but of course I did not let him know. Anthony and I would talk about Richard and wonder about his dick size because when he would pee it would sound long and loud. I know that it sounds kind of sick, but keep in mind that we didn't get sex all the time, so we had to use our imagination. Later on, Rick and I developed crushes on each other at different times, but we thought that it would be better if we just remained friends. Much happened between us. Besides Anthony, he is one of my best friends. We're there for each other.

Rick had moved to Colorado for a few months to become closer to his family. We spoke on the phone at least once a week while he was there. Rick found Colorado boring, so he drove back to New York in a car that he had purchased there. The day after he came back, we decided to go to Foxwood Casino in Connecticut. So Rick, one of my Personal Care Attendant, and I drove 2 ½ hours to get there. We had a great time over there. I won \$50, Rick won \$80, and my Personal Care Attendant lost \$50. My Personal Care Attendant wanted to kill me because on the way home Rick's car broke down. We ended up having to wait on the interstate for a trooper. The trooper called a tow truck, which took the car and us to a garage. One of the garage workers took us to a train station. We ended up having to take two different trains and two buses to get home. Altogether the trip to get home took us about six hours.

I became a Mormon. Rick never liked the idea. I became a Mormon for all the wrong reasons. What happened was that one day I was home alone when they knocked on my door. When I opened the door there were two guys, and one of them was really cute. The cute one asked if he could come in and share the book of Mormon with me. I thought he said he had a book of "more men." I thought to myself, "Sure, I want more men," (Just Joking, I knew what he meant) so I agreed. I was bored out of my mind, I had nothing better to do, and they were cute, so I let them in. In a way I always wanted to belong to a church. By coming to my house and

preaching, they got me to join the church of Mormons. I told them that I was gay, but they kept on coming to my home to preach anyway. I guess they thought they could make me change, and boy did they try. They knew I had some mixed feelings about being gay. They came to my house twice a week to give me lessons on the book of Mormon. I was really happy when they came to teach because I didn't have that many visitors. I developed a crush on one of the Elders who came to teach.

After a month, they invited me to the church for a visit. One Sunday they came to pick me up at nine in the morning. The ward they took me to was the family ward. They have three different wards in the Mormon Church. The wards are the family ward, the single ward, and the Spanish ward. Each ward has three different sessions. They are the sacrament meeting, Sunday school, and the priesthood meeting for the men. They took me to the family ward because the Elders were scheduled to go to the family ward. I was going to belong to the single ward. I was happy to learn that. I'm not a morning person, and the single ward met at three o'clock in the afternoon.

As time went on, I learned more about the Mormons. There were things that I liked and things that I disliked. They have funny beliefs; such as you can't drink coffee or have any caffeine. You had to fast every first Sunday of the month. The fasting wasn't that difficult. You had to skip breakfast and lunch, but you could have dinner. I usually only ate two meals a day anyway, so it wasn't that difficult for me. You had to give at least 10% of your salary, which I never did. I really couldn't spare it. Of course you couldn't do the usual stuff like drink, get high, smoke, be gay, have sex, or masturbate. The main restriction that I didn't like besides masturbation, which I disobeyed every two weeks, was drinking tea. I love to drink iced tea. It took me three months to become a member. Part of becoming a member meant that I had to be baptized into the church. On May 28, 1995, they drowned me in one of the church's pools in the Bronx. They couldn't do it in the church that I was attending in Manhattan because there was something wrong with the pool.

Some time after I was baptized, I met a guy named Raheim. He became my roommate and ended up working for me as a Personal Care Attendant for four months when he lost his job. We got along pretty well. Of course we had disagreements, like all roommates do. He tried to help me follow the church's rules. I was pretty much doing what I was supposed to, but I kept masturbating. After you become a Mormon, they offer you the priesthood. This has different levels. They put me on the lowest level as a Deacon. I never went any higher because I remained gay. They wanted to get me to change my sexuality and offered professional help. Especially when they found out that I was fucking one of their members.

I went to church on Sunday, March 3, 1995, without knowing that my life was going to change. When I went to the priesthood I met a guy named Kris. I use to have some buttons on the side of my wheelchair. One of the buttons was from the GMHC (Gay Men's Health Crisis).

He turned to me and said, "I have the same button." When he said that, I figured he must be gay. I couldn't talk to him at that moment because service was about to begin. After service, I overheard him tell a friend of mine that he was staying in a shelter and he needed a job. When I overheard the conversation I thought to myself, "Well, I want to get to know him so maybe I could offer him a job working for me as a Personal Care Attendant."

When I offered him the job, he said that he was interested. I told him to come by the next day for an interview. After the interview, we talked and he stayed for dinner. He didn't have any money, so I gave him \$5 so he could go and get his picture taken for his work ID, and 14 tokens so he could come to work and go to Concepts (my home attendant agency) with his two photos. I knew I shouldn't have done all that, but I wanted to help him. In the back of my head I thought that if we spent time together he might fall in love with me, and we would end up being a couple. We talked for a while. I asked him if he was gay. He told me that at one time he was gay, but he wasn't anymore. Being gay wasn't for him. Part of me was sad that he said that, but another part of me didn't believe it. Something in me thought that he was in denial.

A week later he began working for me one day a week. We also started hanging out together. As I got to know him, there were things that used to bother me about him. What bothered me was how he sang weird songs on the bus, the way he would call my dog, the music he listened to, and other things. I got used to those things and missed them when he wasn't around later on.

We would spend a lot of time together. I remember a night when we were getting to know each other and we would stay out late. He had a pair of roller skates. We would go around Manhattan with him roller-skating, and me in my motorized chair. He would hold onto my chair, and I would pull him around. We would stay out all night. It would become daylight and we would still be outside. Sometimes when I pass by the neighborhood where we skated, it reminds me of those nights.

He got me into classical music. One day they had a classical music concert in Central Park. We walked back from the concert, which was near 103rd street. I live on 17th street. It was a long walk, but we enjoyed ourselves walking, talking, and getting to know each other.

One time the church was having a function for the senior citizens. I didn't know whether I wanted to go. They were having a dance at the Gay Community Center on the same day. I was supposed to meet up with Anthony at the Center dance. I ended up going to the Senior citizens' function anyway. It took me 3 ½ hours to get there because I had to take four buses. I thought that the function would be over by the time I got there, but it wasn't. I was surprised when I saw Kris there also. I asked him if he wanted to go to the Center's dance with me after the function. He agreed. When we got to the Center I looked for Anthony, but he had left. I had a good time with Kris at the dance.

I remember one time Kris came over and we went to a dance club called the Limelight. We were there until 1am or something like that. Then we walked to Raheim's job (Raheim was my roommate at the time). We stayed there for 30 minutes until he kicked us out because Kris was getting on Raheim's nerves.

While we were walking home, Kris was saying that he felt like no one understood him. When we got home, Kris started talking about his childhood. As we talked I learned that his childhood and mine were very similar. He was brought up by a dysfunctional family just like I was. He grew up feeling lonely and out of place, just like I did. After we finished talking, I said to Kris, "Let's go to bed." I never thought that he would take it literally. We ended up sleeping together in my bed. The whole night I couldn't believe that he was sleeping right next to me in the same bed. Nothing sexual happened, but it felt really good sleeping right next to him. I really didn't sleep that much. I was looking at him most of the night. I couldn't believe how good I felt.

I started feeling guilty about the feelings I was having towards Kris. I was trying to obey the church's rules and beliefs. I was torn between my religion and my attraction to Kris, so I confided in Raheim. Raheim was so into the church that he told me that I had to control what I was feeling. What I was feeling was wrong according to the church.

I also confided in my counselor Henry about my feelings towards Kris. I told him that Kris said that he was no longer gay. Henry told me to take it slow to see what becomes of the relationship between Kris and me.

One night Raheim, Kris, and I went to hang out. It was cool. We mostly talked about the Bible. We bumped into a guy who was drinking and we ended up talking to him about God. I'm not sure, but I think God was working through me when I was talking to him. I was saying and pulling things out of the Bible that related to what was going on. The guy pointed to me and told me that I knew about life. Raheim and I kept talking to him because he was saying that he wanted to kill himself. He had a son. His son's mother had custody of him. It was hard trying to get through to him because he was drinking. He wanted to commit suicide, but I was able to tell him to live for his son. I hope I said something to change his mind, but who knows, right?

That night we stayed out until 7am. We started walking towards the East River, when Kris began saying that we were just like Jesus. We could do whatever we want to do if we put our mind to it: "We are our own God." Raheim and Kris got into a big argument over that comment. I didn't know what to do. Raheim was my roommate and I liked Kris, so I tried to remain neutral. Raheim got angry and walked off. I stayed with Kris until it was daylight. Part of me understood what Kris was trying to say, but another part of me thought that he was nuts. I think that we can control our actions, but we cannot control our destiny.

When Kris and I got home we were going to go to sleep, but Kris wasn't tired. He said he was going to take a shower, but he changed his mind. He got into my bed and we started talking. I asked him if he wanted a massage. He said okay, so I started to give him one. I started to massage his back and worked myself down near his butt and stopped. I asked him if there was anywhere else he wanted me to go. That's when he told me to massage his butt. I was hoping he would say that. I massaged his butt a little then I reached over to see if he'd let me grab his dick, and I was surprised when he turned around. I blew him. Believe me, I felt like I died and went to heaven.

I thought that my search for a boyfriend was over, so I let down my guard and let him into my heart. I thought that I had finally found someone to share my life with. That's when my problems began.

The next day when we woke up, Raheim, Kris and I prayed out loud. Kris asked for forgiveness for what we had done. Afterwards, Kris and I talked about what happened. He told me that he let me blow him because he thought that I had never done that before. He wanted my first experience to be with a friend. What Kris said hurt me. It made me feel like I was a charity case. Later on I was to find out the way Kris really is.

One night we went out dancing. It was fun. I had a good time. We were dancing together and Kris wanted me to suck him off on the dance floor. In a way I felt like doing it. It was an experience that I had fantasized about. But of course I didn't. I told him I didn't like his wanting me to do that. As I'm writing this and thinking about it, a part of me wishes that I had done it.

Kris and I usually slept together, but one night he slept on the floor. He said that he didn't want to sleep with me anymore because I was moving around a lot the night before. I felt so hurt and rejected that I wanted to cry. I didn't want him to stay over any more. I thought to myself, "If he can't sleep with me, then I really don't want him staying here." If we weren't going to be together then why should I pamper him or let him stay here? I decided that I wasn't going to push it. I would wait to see what was going to happen, and let him make the first move.

One day Kris came in and told me something that made my heart drop. He told me that he was leaving New York. He told me that he wanted to travel. I asked him what he was going to do about money. He told me that he didn't care if he didn't have money. He said he wouldn't mind being homeless. I wanted to go with him, but I couldn't because of my disability. I got mad at myself because I wanted to go really badly. But I couldn't do certain things for myself that have to do with everyday living, so I would be in the way. We went out for a while and talked. I told him that I didn't want him to go. I also told him how I really felt about him, how I really cared for him. He said that he liked me a lot too, but not in the same way. I was so hurt that I wanted to cry.

I asked myself, "Why can't anyone I fall in love with fall in love with me? First it was Anthony, then Eric, then Dan, and now Kris. What the fuck is wrong with me? Why can't anyone love me? I'm really getting sick of this fucking life. What's the use of living if I'm going to be alone? I wish God would just take me."

Then I said to myself, "Yeah right, like that's going to happen."

Kris was staying with me, but he also had a room that he was going to be kicked out of. I told him that he could stay with me until he was ready to leave New York.

One day Kris was still working for me and there was a street fair. We walked seven blocks to get to the fair. After the fair I wanted to go somewhere. Kris told me that he was tired. We hadn't walked that much for him to be tired. We had walked more than that before. I couldn't understand why he was tired. Kris wanted to take the bus, but I didn't. It was a nice day and I wanted to walk. I told him that we weren't going to take the bus. I was the boss and he had to do what I told him. I knew that I should have just taken the bus, but I was upset with him. (Before we went out, we had gotten into an argument, so I was still upset.) We got into another argument and he quit. Raheim took over Kris's shift. When Kris got home we talked. I ended up giving him the job back.

Kris, Raheim, and I were planning to go out until Raheim found out that we were going to the Limelight. He didn't want to go, so he turned back. Kris and I ended up going. As we were walking there, Kris and I were talking. The weekend before, Kris and I went to a club called The Tunnel. When we were there, he was all over a guy. I saw him kissing the guy. I ended up getting upset and leaving the Tunnel. I asked him about the guy from the Tunnel. I asked him not in so many words if they fooled around. I don't remember exactly what he answered, but he said that they did fool around.

I got mad and said, "I thought you weren't gay."

"What I do in the club and what I do outside the club are two different things," he said.

I got mad because I was jealous. I was going to turn back and go home, but I didn't. I didn't trust Kris to be alone in the club. I wanted to keep an eye on him because of the incident at the Tunnel. We got into the Limelight for free because Kris always got passes for the clubs. I

didn't like the Limelight because the crowd there was a bunch of teenagers getting high. Kris went off and left me alone for more than an hour. There was one girl who was so high that she couldn't even stand up. I wanted to help her but I couldn't. I remember thinking to myself, "Would I be like these people – doing drugs and having sex with anybody that I meet – if I wasn't disabled?" Just then Kris came back. I asked him to try to get her to go home. What did I ask him that for? He tried to make a pass at her, but just then her friends came. I was losing my love, patience, and understanding for Kris. I was getting tired of him treating me as if I was nothing to him. I was getting so sick of him that I didn't even want to be around him.

The next week Kris told me that he thought it was going to be his last day working for me. Next Friday he was using his pay to move out of New York. I asked Nelson (one of my Personal Care Attendants who was working for me at the time and is still with me) to loan me his camera so I could take some pictures of Kris before he left. Nelson loaned me his camera and I was able to take some pictures of us.

Raheim used to use my computer to go on line. He met someone from Texas. As time went on and they got to know each other, Raheim decided to move to Texas. When the day came for Raheim to leave, Kris and I took the bus with Raheim to the airport and saw him off. Part of me was sad to see him leave. He had kind of grown on me. At the same time I was happy that he was leaving. I thought that Kris and I would have more privacy and we would be able to work things out. Raheim ended up coming back to New York a few months later.

Two days after Raheim left, which was on a Wednesday, Kris told me that he was thinking about going to Montreal. I tried to talk him out of it, but his mind was already set. I figured I might as well help him. I gave him the money that he needed. I believed in the saying: "If you love someone let him go, because if it's meant to be he will come back." The night he was leaving, we went out to the park, ate at McDonald's, came home, talked, listened to music, and spent the evening together. He told me that if he didn't like it in Montreal, he would come back to me. It was just something that he wanted and needed to do. His train was leaving at 8:00 am. We stayed up until it was time for him to leave. I walked him to Penn Station and saw him mount the train. As I watched the train pull out of the station, I wondered if he would ever come back. Walking home I felt numb. I didn't know what to feel. I wanted to cry but I couldn't. I couldn't even think until I got home and opened my door. Then it hit me. Here I was all by myself. Then I saw Kris's towel. I picked it up and started to cry. I ended up falling asleep on the floor with the towel wrapped around me. My Personal Care Attendant Grace came in and asked me what happened because I was on the floor, so I told her. When I told her that Kris had left she told me that I was better off without him. He was making me unhappy. Part of me knew she was right, but that's not what I wanted to hear. All I know is that I was alone once again and I missed Kris. I ended up staying in bed all day.

My weekend wasn't all that great. I stayed home trying to deal with the idea of not seeing Kris again. I knew the kind of person he was – someone who is mostly out for himself. I thought that he would meet someone else and forget all about me. Here I was crying and thinking that I may never see him again. Come Monday morning, I heard someone come into the apartment. I looked at the clock and saw that it was 6 am and that it was too early for it to be my Personal Care Attendant. I was thinking it was Raheim. When my bedroom door opened, to my surprise it was Kris.

I ask him, "What happened? Why did you come back so soon?"

"I told you that I'd be back if I didn't like it."

"Yeah, but I didn't think that you would be back so soon," I told him as I was sitting up in bed.

I thought he was coming home so quickly because he really loved me and wanted to be with me. He sat down on the bed next to me and we talked. One thing led to another and we started kissing. Things started to get really hot, so we ended up having sex. I asked Kris if he would fuck me. I thought to myself, "If I was going to have someone fuck me for the first time, I wanted it to be him." Believe me, it was quite an experience. I don't know what kind of an experience because it hurt both physically and mentally. Physically, because he didn't use any lubricant and he acted like he wanted to get it over with. Mentally, because he showed no emotion. I was disappointed. It was my first time having anal sex and Kris didn't show any affection or passion. When it was over he got up, took a shower, and fell asleep. I went into the living room and sat on the couch trying to think of a way to dismiss my hurt feelings. I kept making excuses to myself.

"Maybe he acted that way because he was tired, or maybe it was because I didn't turn him on because of my disability." I always thought about that. Maybe if I weren't disabled we would have had a better relationship.

Since he was my first, my attraction became fatal. I fell in love with him, but it was only one-sided. I put everyone aside for him. I became obsessed. The more love I showed him, the more he took advantage of me. He wanted me to give up everything for him. He even wanted me to choose between him, my friends, and my mother. In a way I did choose him over my friends. I wouldn't listen to any of my friends when they tried to give me advice and warn me about him. Sometimes I would argue with my friends when they said something bad about Kris. I almost lost all my friends because of Kris.

One time he shocked me when he told me something. I couldn't believe my ears. Well I could, because it was coming from him, and I knew how sick he could be. One night when my mother left, we started to talk. During the conversation, he told me that he wouldn't mind having sex with my mother. I couldn't believe what I heard. I wanted to kick him out, but I didn't because I was afraid of losing him. Everyone tried to warn me about him, especially Rick. They used to tell me I couldn't lose something that I didn't even have. At this point, I was so obsessed. I didn't trust anybody, and I didn't want anyone near him. I was so hung up on him. When he said what he did about my mother, I didn't even want to leave my mother alone with him. That's how obsessed I was.

One time I heard him in the living room talking on the phone and I wanted to know who he was on the phone with. I picked up the other phone in my bedroom to see who was on the other line. He was talking to a girl. He told the girl that he had a friend that he messed around with but that they were not getting along. I knew he was talking about me. I was getting angry and jealous because they were talking about sex. I knew he didn't consider us lovers, but I did.

One day Kris and I got into a fight, and I mean a fistfight. He wanted me to stop thinking of him in a sexual way. He told me that the way that I kissed and the way we made love did not turn him on. He said that he disliked the way that I moved during sex (because I can't control my movements all that well) and that he did not find me attractive. (Because of that comment I get

self-conscious when I am with someone who compliments me on my kissing or my lovemaking. I become uncomfortable because I think they are lying to me just to make me feel good.)

He started getting violent. He would touch my face and ask me, “Do you want to have sex? Let’s have sex. Do you still like me now?” He kept poking me in the face as he teased me. I asked him to please stop touching my face. Then he grabbed my arm and pulled me off the wheelchair onto the floor. When I tried to get up he wouldn’t let me; he kept holding me down. I tried to fight back, but I couldn’t. I tried to get away from him. I started to open the front door when he grabbed my arm and dragged me back. He asked me to give him back the money that he had given me for food earlier that day. I refused, so he went into my bedroom, opened my bag and took it. I came into my bedroom to see if he had taken the money, which he had. When he left the bedroom, I locked the door. I was going to call the cops, but I stopped myself because I convinced myself that it was my fault. He told me that he didn’t like me in a sexual way, but I didn’t listen. I thought that I could change his mind.

After we calmed down, we sat on the floor in the room and he apologized. He said he didn’t mean to hurt me. He helped me get on the bed. He laid down next to me, and I fell asleep in his arms.

The next day I was still mad so I looked in his journal. I wanted to find out whom he was seeing. I couldn’t read that much, because he came in the room. I wouldn’t have done that, but he had lost my trust by going into my bag and taking the money.

I told myself, “I’m not going to let him hit me again.”

One Male to Another

We met in a sacred place.
You came to me and said; "I have the same button."
We couldn't speak at that time.
So we didn't say anything, because there was a service going on.
I sat there thinking that I wanted to get to know you, and then maybe we could share our lives.
But I was afraid for what the church might do to us.
If they only knew, I wanted you in my life.
But you cannot be my wife, for you are a male and I am a male.
So the church won't let us share our lives.

CHAPTER 9

I was blind to the fact that I needed help when it came to Kris. Maybe I did see it, but I ignored it. I didn't want to face being alone again. His birthday was two days after the fight. I went and bought him a birthday card. I knew I had to be crazy for getting him a card. That's how consumed with him I was.

We went to the movies and I got us in for free. I talked the manager into letting us see a movie for free because the movie we wanted to see was playing upstairs. The upstairs was not wheelchair accessible, so he let us see another movie for free downstairs. When we were watching the movie "Jack," starring Robin Williams, there were parts that made me glad that I was watching it with Kris. I looked at him and wished that we were closer, but he made it clear that that would never happen because of the fight. I still loved him, but I lost some respect for him because of what he did to me. I knew that's what he wanted, for me to change the way that I felt towards him.

After we got home from the movies, something happened that I thought would never happen again. I had a nice time with Kris all night. It was almost like we used to be. We talked, played, laughed, and sort of had sex (I blew him). We slept on the living room floor together naked. It felt like old times. Just because we had a nice night I thought that there was hope, but I was wrong. He went out with a girl the next day and stayed out the whole night. I was tired of this roller coaster with Kris. I knew sooner or later that I was going to get sick of it. I wasn't going to care about how much I loved him: I was going to let him go. The next day we got into another argument. We couldn't even talk anymore without getting into an argument 90% of the time.

I had two lawsuits that were going to be settled. One was with a bus and the other one a mini van. The bus hit me in 1992. The mini van hit me in 1996. With the bus case, my Personal Care Attendant and I were standing on the corner waiting for the light to change when I saw the bus make a sharp turn. The back of the bus jumped on the sidewalk. Before I had a chance to move, the bus caught onto my wheelchair and dragged me a few feet. When the bus stopped, my motorized wheelchair tipped over. I didn't get hurt that bad but it took four years to settle the case. I got \$20,000 for that case. In the case of the mini van, I was halfway across the street when the mini van hit me. It happened on a winter night on my way home. The van caused some

damage to my left foot. The driver tried to bribe me with a \$20 bill. I told him that I was not taking his money but he put it in my pocket anyway. He told me to go and buy something for the pain. I knew that if I left and my leg was really seriously hurt, I would not have any right to sue, so I told the driver to call the police and the ambulance. I ended up getting \$6,000 for that accident. I was surprised but happy that I got the money for both accidents at about the same time. My lawyer said if the injury that I had gotten from the mini van had been from the bus, I would have gotten a lot more.

I thought that the money would have an effect on Kris, but it didn't. Kris just got more demanding. He wanted to use the phone whenever he felt like it, and he wanted me to leave the door open to my room. I used to lock my bedroom door after the fight, because I didn't trust him anymore.

At one time he suggested that we switch rooms. He wanted me to sleep in the living room and he would sleep in the bedroom, because the Personal Care Attendants would wake him up in the morning when they came in. I almost laughed in his face when he said that. What the hell was he thinking? I told him if he were sleeping with me, the Personal Care Attendants wouldn't wake him up when they came in. If he was my lover I would have done everything he wanted and more, but why should I bend backwards to please him when he wasn't pleasing me?

My jealousy was getting the best of me. I would get angry when Kris was on the phone. It didn't matter whom he was talking to. One day I told my Personal Care Attendant Nelson to disconnect the phone wires from inside the jacks. When Kris picked up the phone, he told me that there was something wrong with it. I told him that they were going to come that Monday to fix it. He never found out that Nelson disconnected the phone wires. I had two separate phone lines in the house, my regular phone line and a fax line. That weekend I went out. Kris asked me to let him rent a tape with my Blockbuster card, so I did. I left the door to my room open so that he could watch the tape that he rented. I thought I could trust him not to use the fax phone, but of course he did. When I got home he wasn't there, so I pressed redial on the fax phone and some guy answered. I asked for Kris and the guy told me that Kris had just left, so that got me really pissed. I was so hurt that I sat down and wrote Kris a letter. This is what I wrote:

8/21/96

Kris:

I know that you don't like when I write things that I want to say, but whenever we talk we get into an argument. I don't want to get into one with you, but I do need to tell you something. Well, here it goes. I'm giving you two weeks' notice. I want you out by September 4. I can't live like this anymore. I can't live with someone I'm sexually attracted to when they don't feel the same towards me, and to top it off they are going out with other people and having those people call my house. I wouldn't mind them calling you if I knew that we were together, and you know what I mean by that. I mean that if we were getting along as lovers, then I wouldn't mind as much. We're not even getting along as friends, nevertheless as lovers. I tried to think of you as a friend, but all my feelings I had for you as a friend changed the day we had that fight. I can't forgive or forget it as a friend. I might be able to forgive it if we were lovers, but you don't want that so I can't let you stay here and put myself through hell anymore. I can't stop wanting you when I see you everyday. Unless our relationship changes (and I don't think it's

going to), you have to leave. I would like you in my life, but not as a friend. If I'm wrong for putting my feelings first, well let it be. Everything you want me to give you is what I would give to someone who cares for me. Sorry it had to come to this, but it did. You have to find somewhere to go in two weeks, because I don't see our relationship going the way I want it to.

Carmelo

When I gave him the letter, I thought that Kris and I were going to have a fight, but instead he said that he would leave. I didn't know if I would have the strength to remind him to leave when the two weeks were up.

Every day we ended up having an argument. He'd get upset because I wouldn't let him use the phone. He told me that it wasn't fair for me to use the phone if he couldn't use it. I went along with him for one day. I realize that no matter what I did, I couldn't please him. We argued because I used some of his food. I gave him \$5 to replace the food that I had eaten. He told me that I couldn't sing, so I had no business singing. He would put me down whenever I sang. I got pissed and turned the radio up real loud and sang louder. He said that I shouldn't be using words that I can't pronounce. In other words he was saying that because of my speech impairment, I don't know how to sing. He told me that I wasn't good in bed and that I didn't know how to please him. He told me that he was my only friend, and that I was going to lose his friendship.

I didn't throw him out that Wednesday like I was supposed to, but I threw him out that weekend. He went to use the phone, and I told him not to use my phone anymore. When I went in the bathroom, I heard him talking. When I came out he was on the phone. I asked him to get off the phone. He acted like he didn't hear me and kept talking, so I pulled the wire out of the jack while he was still having his conversation. He didn't like what I did so we started to argue. He was lying down on the couch. When I got near him he lifted up his leg and told me that he felt like kicking my ass. I told him if he ever hit me again I would call the cops and throw him out. He went out for a while and when he came back he told me that I couldn't throw him out. He thought that since I had written him a letter to take to welfare stating that he was renting a room from me, it gave him tenants' rights. I started to laugh.

He dared me to call the cops, so I did. When they came, I told them that Kris was my lover. He had hit me once and tried to hit me again, so I wanted him out of my house. They asked who was on the lease and I told them I was. The cops told Kris he had to leave. Kris told them that he had proof that he belongs here and showed them the letter I had given him for welfare. He saw that the cops weren't buying his story, so he told the cops that I was sexually harassing him. The cops told him that the letter didn't mean shit, and they almost started to laugh when he mentioned the sexual harassment bit. They told him that he had to get his things and get out. He got some things and left.

I hated that I missed him after I threw him out. I tortured myself thinking about him. I regretted that I told him to leave, and I wished that he were here. I made myself believe that, even though he was abusive. At least I wasn't alone.

About a week after I threw him out, I wrote him another letter.

Dear Kris:

I hope you come back so I can give you this letter, so I can let you know what I'm feeling. Perhaps you are mad at me, and I expect you to be. Look Kris, I'm going to say it straight out – I miss you like crazy. It's been so lonely in the house without you. Even Sunshine misses you as much as I do. You might not want to come back, but in a way I'm asking you to come back. I might be crazy for wanting you back, but I can't stop thinking about you and the things we used to do. Yes, we used to fight like cats and dogs. I don't miss the fighting as much as I miss having you in my life. The weird sounds that you used to make that would make me go crazy (like the way you would call our dog Sunshine), now drive me crazy because I can't hear them. I think a lot about the things we used to do. Like the time when we went to the Museum of TV and Radio. You started to sing on the bus. I wanted to kill you. Things like that would drive me crazy. Everybody tells me that I need to forget you because you don't care anything for me. They ask me why I miss you when you're not even thinking about me. They might be right; you might not think about me at all. You are probably too busy having fun with whatever you're doing out there. It's cool. I just want to know if we could work something out because I don't want to lose you, though I think I already have. I don't know if you remember that I told you I would always be here for you. I really meant that. No matter what happens between us. I think you already know that. Well, I hope you do. We have been through a lot together, Kris, to end it now. I know you tried to work it out with me. I'm just asking if we could give it another try. If you don't want to, I will understand. I just want you to understand and know that you mean a lot to me. If you ever need help, I will be here. I hope you'll be okay out there. Please take care of yourself, and remember Sunshine and I are here for you.

Carmelo

I put the letter in an envelope and taped it to my front door. It was there for a week and a half when it disappeared. My heart was racing when I saw that the letter was no longer there. I was sure Kris had taken the letter.

One day all my memories of Kris started flashing in my head. It was like a movie playing in my mind. For some reason, everywhere I went brought back memories of Kris. It got so bad that I screamed. I wanted the flashbacks to stop. I couldn't take them any more. I started to walk home, and when I got in front of my building I saw a guy who resembled Kris. I thought it was Kris. I started to get nervous. My heart started racing, but it was some other guy. When I came upstairs there was a sticker of a spider on my door that wasn't there before. I thought for sure that Kris had put it there. About a week later I found out that Kris was in Florida, so it could not have been him. About four years later I found out that it was my friend Rick who put the spider on the door.

I missed Kris so much that I couldn't take it anymore. I called the Phone Company and asked them to send me a printout of the calls that were made from my house. When I got the printout, I called all the phone numbers that I didn't recognize. I reached a girl who was Kris's friend. She in turn called Kris's brother. His brother called Kris, and Kris told his brother to give me the phone number where he was staying. I called him. It was good to hear his voice. I missed

it. We talked like a good hour. He blamed me for everything. He said that it was my fault that he left. I was like an ass and agreed with him because I wanted him to come back. When I got off the phone, I felt stupid, because I realized that he's going on with his life, and I'm here caring for him.

That night Jermaine called to ask if he could come over. I was feeling so bad because of the conversation that I had with Kris that I wanted to feel like someone cared for me. I told Jermaine to come over. When he came over, I ended up having sex with him. He was here for 20 minutes when we started kissing. I stopped him from kissing me because I didn't want to kiss him. I just wanted to fuck him. We went in the bedroom, and I fucked him. I was fucking him so hard that he was banging his head on the wall. After we finished having sex, I asked Jermaine to go home. I didn't want him to sleep over. While I was having sex with Jermaine, I was wishing it were Kris.

About a week after I spoke to Kris on the phone, I received a letter from him telling me he was happy in Florida and that the family of the guy he was staying with treated him like part of their family. That night I sat down and I wrote this letter to Kris:

Dear Kris.

Oct. 6, 1996

First, I would like to thank you for telling your brother to call me and give me your number so I could talk to you. I was relieved to hear from you and hear that you're doing fine out there. That's all I want for you. I'm sending a copy of a letter I wrote to you when you left. I kept it on my door in case you ever came by. I had it there for three weeks and someone took it. I thought it was you because I had written your name on the envelope. I guess it wasn't you because you're out there. I told you over the phone how I felt. Yes, I was hard on you. You did try to work with me, and I was a little unreasonable and I'm sorry. I meant what I said. If you ever need help I will be here for you. You asked me if you do come back what would be different? The difference would be that I would try to be more willing to work things out. You might not come back to New York because you said there is nothing here for you. I know it may not mean much, but Sunshine and I are here if you need a friend. Since you left, I've had time to think, and I found out that our friendship means more to me than I thought. We had a lot of good times, and I miss those times. The time you spent here brought lots of good things into my life. Yes, there were some bad times, but I would like to think that the good times meant more to me. Knowing you as I do, you're going to travel before you even think about coming back to New York. Wherever you go, have a good time. Sunshine says hi and I know she misses you a lot. Every time she hears the hallway door she thinks it's you. Well I'm hoping you will come back. I want to go skydiving, but it looks like you're not coming back anytime soon. I'm going to go skydiving in November. If you let me know where you're going to be staying, I'll send you some pictures, if you'd like me to. Talking about pictures, here are some of us, and one of your dog Sunshine. I say "your dog" because I consider her yours as well as mine. She loves you as much if not more than me. Don't worry about the stuff that you left; I'll hold it for you. Well Kris, that's going to be all. I'm sending you a self-addressed, stamped envelope so you can write if

you like. I'd like to ask one, well, two favors. One, keep in touch and let me know how you're doing, and two, if you take any pictures, send me one please. Well Kris, take care of yourself. I will always care for you.

Always your friend,
Carmelo

I sent this letter with a copy of the other letter I wrote to him. After I sent him the letter, I started thinking about the phone call and how he is living in Florida with that other guy. The thought of him being with another guy started festering in my mind, and it made me angry and jealous.

Two days after I sent the letter, I got a shock. Even Nelson was shocked. Someone knocked on my door. When Nelson opened the door, Kris was there. I didn't know how long he would stay, but I hoped it was going to be for a while.

When I saw him, I couldn't speak for a good 10 seconds. I didn't know what to say, what to do, or anything. Then something else happened that really shocked me. Nelson was feeding me, and he asked Nelson if he could finish feeding me. I almost walked. I thought that Kris had changed. That his being with someone else made him realize that he did have feelings for me, and that we might have a chance together after all. I had printed out a copy of the letter I wrote him. I told him I was happy he was home. He said he was glad to be back. I thought I was never going to see him again. I had received some tickets I had ordered for Kris and I to go to a classical music concert. I was thinking that I got them to go with Kris, but he wasn't here. Then he showed up.

I wanted it to work out. I prayed to God to help me control my jealousy and not mess this up and to go on with my life as if he had never come back. That night we watched the movie "Up Close and Personal." The soundtrack had a song that I liked and had sung to him once. Some of the words were, "I'm everything I am because you love me." I thought I was going to be alone with Kris that night, but my cousin Elvin came and stayed over. I wanted it just to be Kris and me, but Elvin fucked it up.

I couldn't believe how things were working out since he had come back. It was like the old days when we first met – going out all night, hanging out in the clubs, going for walks, and staying up all night talking. Even the sex was going well. I was on cloud nine.

LONELY

Lonely might be the most painful word there is. A word that has no prejudice. It doesn't care if you are white or black. It doesn't care if you young or old, rich or poor. You could be surrounded with a lot of people or no one at all. It could take you without any warning, and when it does you would know. You might ask what is it? It's a feeling that you feel when you feel that you need someone to hold you in they're arms, and no one is around to hold you. When you feel that you need to talk to some one, and there's no one around to listen to what you are saying. When you are crying and there isn't anyone there to dry the tears from your face. It's a silent killer that could kill before your eyes. It could hold you hostage in its world and it may make you think there's no way for you to get away. But there is a way out, just reach out and take hold on life and take charge.

CHAPTER 10

Everything was fine for three weeks until he started up with his shit again. We were playing a video game and he called a girl. He started talking about sex and something about how he liked her and other things like that. My fucking mind went crazy with all kinds of thoughts. I couldn't take it, so I stopped playing and went out to calm down. I really didn't have it in me to go through the same shit again. I knew that I needed to control my fucking jealousy, or let him go before it drove me crazy, and I knew that it would.

That Halloween I was supposed to go to a Halloween dance at the Mormon Church. I didn't go because I thought I was going to hang out with Kris. But we didn't go out until after midnight. When we finally went out, he made me feel like shit. He told me that he didn't like hanging out with me because he had to do everything for me. When he said that, it was like a stab in the heart, but I brushed off what he said. It wasn't the first time that someone had said that to me. My family would say that constantly when I was growing up. What he was saying and doing to me weren't any different from what my family said and did to me when I was growing up. Maybe that was why I put up with him. He also said a lot of other things, but we kind of ended up having an okay time.

We went by the Tunnel (a nightclub) to see what was going on. They were going to let me get in for free, but we couldn't go because Kris didn't have any money, and I wasn't going to pay for him. I was feeling bad because of what he had told me, so I tried to make him feel bad. I told him that I wished I had my motorized wheelchair so I could have gone in the Tunnel without him. He didn't feel shit. That fucking boy has no feelings at all. Then he went and bought Midol (that's for women with PMS). He wanted us to take it to see what it would do to us. I wanted to know what it was for. He didn't want to tell me what it was for unless I took it. He kept on pushing me to take it. After a while, I said fuck it and I took it. It didn't do shit to me, but it did something to him. What it did to him, I didn't know and I didn't care. He was saying that he doesn't have any friends. I wonder why?

The next argument we had was because my Personal Care Attendant couldn't come in, so I asked him to work for me for three hours and I would pay him. He wanted to get paid for 11 hours, but I only needed him for three hours. Although he agreed to work three hours, I gave in a little and let him work five hours. When he started to work, he got a phone call and he talked and

talked. I couldn't tell him to get off the phone because he had his own phone installed, so I said fuck it and went in my room. I called my mother and asked her to come in to help me. Kris got upset when he saw my mother come in. When she went to walk my dog Sunshine, Kris and I got into an argument over my asking my mother to come in after I had asked him to work. I had to end the argument before my mother came back or she would have told him to get the fuck out. I know I should have let her throw him out, but he still had a hold on me. I knew I was going to get sick of him and kick him out again.

That weekend my brother Nelson came to watch a fight on pay-per-view. My brother noticed the tension between Kris and me so he asked me to walk him to the store so we could talk. When I told him that Kris and I weren't getting along, he asked me if I wanted him to get involved. He also asked if Kris had ever hit me. I lied and answered "no" to both questions. I knew that my brother would have kicked his ass, and I wanted to avoid a confrontation. When we came back, Kris and Nelson went to the hall to smoke a cigarette. Nelson asked Kris what was going on. Kris told Nelson that the problem was that I thought that we were lovers, but we weren't and that I kept on thinking that we were. When Nelson and I were alone, he told me what they had talked about. He told me that Kris told him that he did not care for me in the same way that I cared for him. Nelson told me that I needed to let it go and not persist. He said you couldn't make someone love you and that I should move on. I was thinking to myself that he wasn't telling me something I hadn't told myself a thousand times. The problem with me is that I'm the type of person who keeps trying until I get what I want, even if I know it's impossible. In some cases, its good that I'm like that, but with Kris, it wasn't. As you read on, you will see my persistence almost ended up killing me.

Kris and I decided that it would be best if he moved. Two days before he was supposed to leave I wrote him a letter explaining that I really tried to change my romantic feelings for him, but I couldn't. I gave him the letter and waited to see if he would say something, but he said he didn't have anything to say. I knew it was going to kill me when the day for him to leave came. Even though I knew that I had to give up trying, another part of me would not let go. The part of me that wouldn't let go was the stubborn part. I was like an alcoholic, and Kris was my sex on the beach (that's a drink with vodka, Peach Schnapps and several different juices).

The next day, I called Jermaine and asked him to come over because I wanted to see if I could make Kris jealous. I wanted to get laid and I wanted to see what Kris would do if he knew that I was having sex. I was on top of Jermaine and Kris came in to go to the bathroom. He saw me fucking Jermaine and went in the bathroom. He used the other door to go out. (I have two doors that lead to the bathroom. One of the doors goes from the living room into the bathroom. The other door is wider so that my wheelchair will fit through. That door goes from the bedroom to the bathroom). I wonder what went through his mind when he saw and heard us. I tried to make as much noise as I could. I had a feeling that Jermaine liked Kris or wanted to have sex with him, and I didn't like that idea. As a matter of fact, I was so obsessed with Kris that I thought he would have sex with anyone who wanted to have sex with him. I kicked Jermaine out of the house just in case he was planning to make a pass at Kris. I didn't want anyone near him. I went as far as thinking that even my friends wanted to have sex with him.

In the beginning of our friendship, Kris was keeping a journal. He told me that he would like to have it typed up. I paid a friend of Nelson's (my Personal Care Attendant) to type up

Kris's journal. I read some of it and found out that he was in the same boat I was in. He liked some guy he had slept with, and the guy didn't want to have anything to do with him. I don't know how he dealt with that situation because he didn't write about how he dealt with it. I thought that his journal would help me understand him better, but all it did was confuse me more. The way he treated me was the same way he treated just about everybody. I didn't find this out until recently, when I finished reading his journal after we separated for the last time.

As I mentioned in the last chapter, I had ordered some tickets for the Symphony orchestra. Kris and I were supposed to go together, but we had a fight. He wanted me to give him the tickets so that he could take someone else. I ended up going to the concert with Mark, my friend from the church. That reminds me of a time that I took Kris to see a Broadway play called "The Life." He was supposed to meet me at the theater at 7:30. He ended up getting there an hour late. I was so pissed. The show had already started, but we went in to see it anyway. When we left we walked by a guy and two girls who were standing outside the playhouse. They were laughing and having a good time, and Kris commented to me that if I hadn't been there he would have tried his best to find a way to hang out with them. I was so hurt. I took him to a Broadway show. He showed up late, and after he told me that he didn't like the show. Then he told me that hanging out with me is like hanging out with his father, and he wished that he were hanging out with the guy and two girls we passed by. I told him to go and catch up with them and he went to try, but he couldn't. I tried to follow him. I lost him and ended up going home alone. As I was walking home, I started to think about everything that happened that evening and blamed myself for everything that went wrong. I ended up crying.

That week when I saw my therapist Henry, I told him that I was feeling depressed and that I felt suicidal. Henry suggested that I see a psychiatrist. I had told him that I wanted to get on medication for my depression. I knew that I had to do something, because my Personal Care Attendant Nelson was about to quit. Nelson was tired of Kris and me always fighting. Nelson saw that I was suffering and that all this was taking its toll on him and me. I knew that I had to do something because there was no way that I was going to lose Nelson because of Kris.

Kris was always jealous of my relationship with Nelson. Kris would always try to make me fire Nelson. He would tell me that the only way our relationship would get better is if I got rid of Nelson and let him take care of me. He felt that I spent too much time with my Personal Care Attendants, so if he were to become my Personal Care Attendant again we would be spending more time together. I told him over and over that I didn't think that it was a good idea to have my lover work for me. It was too much responsibility and work for a lover to be the Personal Care Attendant. I asked him why he would want to work for me if he didn't like being around me. Did he want to take care of his father?

When I saw the psychiatrist, she put me on Effexor. She mixed up the dosage on the medication. She was supposed to put me on 50 mg, but she ended up giving me 75mg instead. When I took the pill, I felt like I was on speed. The dosage was too strong for me. Still, they ended up having to raise the dosage to 100 mg, because my body had gotten used to it and it was not having any effect on me. Getting on this medication started to make me feel like my old self again. I was still having my problems with Kris, but the medication helped me handle Kris better.

One day we were alone, so I asked Kris if he wanted to smoke a joint (marijuana). Every time we smoked, we ended up having sex. After we smoked, we were able to talk and caress each

other. I started blowing him and he told me to stop, so I did. We sat on the couch and held each other instead. He held me for two minutes. I felt like I had died and gone to heaven for those two minutes. He stopped holding me, but I continued to hold him till he fell asleep on the couch. That was one of the few times that I forgot about all the rotten things that he had done to me. I thought to myself that he did care for me but didn't know how to show it. Maybe I just needed to give it time, and in time he would realize that he did love me. It was just another fantasy that I had and did not want to give up. I guess it was because I didn't want to be alone. I was too in love with the fantasy I had of Kris.

It was Christmas time and Kris mentioned that he wanted a pair of roller blades, so I figured that I would buy him a pair for Christmas. Due to the settlement, I had money to buy everyone gifts. I bought my mother a TV and a microwave, and I bought everybody what they wanted, more or less. When I went to buy Kris his gift, I was happy because I was going to get him something that I knew he had wanted for a while. There was a sale on roller blades, so I got them for \$50. They normally would have cost \$90, so I got a good price. It made me happy because I knew that I was going to make Kris happy when I gave him the roller blades.

I did everything that I could to hint to Kris that I wanted a teddy bear from him. I had to come out and say to him that I wanted him to give me a teddy bear because he wouldn't get the hints that I gave him. I wanted to have something from him that I could remember him by, because our relationship was on its last leg. I had bought the blades three weeks before Christmas and Kris found out. Everyday for three weeks, Kris would ask me to give him his Christmas gift. I got fed up with him harassing me to give him his gift, so I came out and told him, plain and simple, "I'll give you the skates if you get me a teddy bear."

I didn't feel right saying that. I really wanted the teddy bear to come from him, not because I gave him an ultimatum. When I woke up the next day, Kris came in the room and handed me a light brown teddy bear. He said, "Here's the teddy bear that you wanted. Now can I get my skates?"

I gave him the skates. When I saw the bear, I was happy that it was a nice size. I just wished that he had given it to me with a little more feeling. Now I was asking too fucking much. I used to sleep with it. Hey, I couldn't have Kris. It was the next best thing.

Once again I was wrong in thinking that I was going to make him happy. He didn't like the skates that I got him. He said that they were cheap, so he didn't want them. I told him if he didn't like the roller blades, he should give them back and I'd give them to someone else. When he heard that, he changed his mind and said that he was going to keep them. He made sure that I knew that he still thought that they were cheap. I also gave him some CD's that he liked. Believe it or not, he did say that I deserved to get a gift if anybody did. When I heard that, I almost walked. I couldn't believe those words came out of his mouth.

I had sex with Kris the day after Christmas. Well, what really happened was I got him off. When it was over, I regretted it because I was blowing him and he came in my mouth. I didn't want to swallow it, so I went to the bathroom and spit it out. My gums bleed sometimes, so I thought that if he had HIV, it would enter my body through my gums. I thought he would let me know when he was coming, but he didn't. I thought I was really fucked. I wanted him to take an HIV test, and I would pay for it, but I didn't know how I was going to get him to take it. I asked

him if he ever had an HIV test before. He told me that he did, but he never went to get the results. I didn't know what to do. I waited six months and got tested. I didn't have it.

Christmas came. I didn't have anyone working that day, so I had to go to my sister Miriam's house. Miriam took me to her church. I asked Raheim to stay here because I didn't want to leave Kris here alone. I was afraid that he would bring someone to the apartment. My aunt and two of my cousins were at Miriam's house. I hadn't seen them in 10 years. My mother, Ralph, and my brother Nelson arrived later. I asked Nelson to bring me home because I wanted to spend some time with Kris. I don't think it mattered to Kris that I went home, or whether we spent Christmas together. I gave him a camera that I got him. I don't know if he liked the camera or not. I don't think so; he didn't say or act like he did.

I was going to an acting school named The National Theater Workshop of the Handicapped. I've been going to acting school since 1994. One time we had an open class. An open class is when we invite people to see what we are working on. I asked Kris, my Personal Care Attendant Nelson, and Junior (Nelson's roommate) to come see the performance. After the performance, we walked home. I wasn't in a good mood. I don't know why, but having Kris with us put me in a fucked up mood. We got home and I had to go for a walk because Kris was getting on my nerves. I took my dog for a walk, so I could calm down. I calmed down a little. It was when we started drinking that my mood changed. I got fucked up but I still knew what was up. When Nelson and JR left, I went in the room and got some condoms. I put them in my undies, in case Kris and I were going to do something. We did. Kris was so high that I got him to hold me again. This time it was just for a minute, but I tried to enjoy that minute all I could. When I went to blow him, I put a condom in my mouth to put it on him. I couldn't get it on so he put it on and I did what I did. He didn't do anything to me. Once again he was the only one who got worked on. I didn't even feel like doing anything with him any more, but I knew I would because I was still in love with him.

The guy who runs the acting class asked me if I was gay. When I told him yes, he said he knew somebody who wanted to write a play about a gay disabled man. They had told this writer about me. When I met the guy, he started asking me questions about myself. So I told him about my life. Of course, I mentioned Kris, so he decided to write one scene about Kris and me. I was supposed to act in the scene, but the school would not give me the chance to do it because of my speech impairment. I quit the school two years later as a result.

I wanted to spend that New Year's Eve with Kris, but he ended up going out with some girl. About ten days after New Year's, we got into an argument. He said to write on the calendar the date I wanted him to leave. I didn't write any date, so he did. He wrote 1:30 pm next to the 10th on the calendar, which he thought was the next day. But he was mixed up because that day was the 10th. I asked him if he was sure that he wanted to leave on the 10th, and he said yes. Since it was 1pm, I told him that he had a half-hour to leave, so he left. Before leaving, he put me down. He said that the government gave me everything, and I mooch off of the government. While he was packing, I gave him a letter that I wrote. He read it out loud as if it was a joke. When he left, I was so upset that I wanted to go to bed. I wanted that day to be over with. I didn't want to deal with people anymore. I was starting to hate everybody and feeling like I should kill myself. It's funny that he put me down for mooching off the government, though; right now he's

collecting SSI. I don't know what for. He told me that they found him mentally unstable. I could have told them that!

I LIVE

I live for the time.
When you'll be by my side.
I live for the time.
When you'll always say "good night!"
I live for the time, when you make everything all right.
I live for you to love me.
I live for you to care.
I live for you to tell me that you'll always be there.
Because baby I love you but you just don't care.
People try to tell me that you would cause me pain,
and you'll always stay the same.
I'm the one that's living it.
So you'll never understand my pain.
How much you just don't know.
I try to deny it because I don't want to let you go,
for I know if I do I'll miss you so.
So how can I let you go, when all I want to do is hold you in my arms, and you would always say
that you would always be mine.
I thought it was a dream that could never come true.
You just confirmed it with those two words. "We're through!"
Then I realized that I need to live for me. Because you just set me free.

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CHAPTER 11

Obviously, I was obsessed with Kris. Every time I threw him out, I wanted him back. I was so afraid that he wasn't coming back this time that I resorted to witchcraft. I must sound like a stupid fool, wanting him back every time I kicked him out. You would understand if you ever were in an abusive relationship and had low self-esteem. I stayed with Kris because I thought that I wouldn't be able to find anyone better. I had been alone for a long time. I thought that I was never going to find a man who would want to be with me. My family had had a hard time taking care of me, so why would a man want that responsibility? I had men come on to me, but I didn't like them, or it never turned into anything serious if I did. When Kris came into my life and started working as my Personal Care Attendant and our relationship started to become intimate, I thought, "Carmelo, you finally found someone you like. Don't let this one get away. This might be your only opportunity."

My obsession with Kris just kept getting stronger and stronger. I bought a witchcraft book with the intention of putting a spell on Kris. Ginger, a friend who lives upstairs, came down and saw me reading it. She told me that she was into witchcraft, so I asked her to help me with the spell. After we tried to put the spell on Kris, he called me that night. He wanted to know if he could pick up some of his things. I told him that he could pick them up whenever he wanted to. He asked me if I was happy being alone and if I was going to change. I asked him the same things. He got upset and hung up the phone. In a way I thought that the spell was working, and in a way I didn't.

He looked fine when he came and got his stuff the next day. When he was leaving he wanted to tell me something, but he didn't. I wonder what it was that he wanted to tell me. Knowing him, it wasn't anything I wanted to hear.

The next day I found a witchcraft store and bought something that was supposed to control him and make him do what I wanted.

Kris called to see if he could come to get the rest of his things. I really didn't want to give him the roller blades that I gave him for Christmas, but I figured what the hell. I got the Teddy bear that I wanted. I did buy the skates for him, so why not give him the skates? So I did. I don't think the spell worked, because I didn't see any change in him. He was still acting cold towards me. I remember thinking after Kris left that he looked really good. He had a goatee. Well

as they say, when you break up with someone and don't see them for a few days, they always look good. He started staying with his father, which made me happy because I knew that he was not on the streets.

When Kris called again, I asked him if he wanted to come to dinner. He said okay, so we made plans for that Tuesday, the following week. I asked my Personal Care Attendant Nelson and his roommate JR to join us. When Tuesday came, I had to do something, so I left Nelson at my place to get things ready. When I got home, Kris was already at my place. We said hi to each other, and Nelson and I went to cook. I made believe that I had another guy coming for dinner to see if Kris would get jealous, but he didn't. We didn't speak to each other until JR came. When we were eating, Kris got into the shit about why I called the cops on him. I asked JR if he was going to sleep over. JR asked Kris if he was going to stay. Kris didn't answer, so JR said that if Kris left, he was going to leave. When Kris left, so did JR. JR knew that I thought he wanted Kris, yet he fucking left with him. Prior to that night, Kris had told me that JR made a pass at him. I confronted JR, and JR told me that he was only joking around. Joking or not, JR should not have left with Kris. I got so upset that I hit the table and hurt my elbow. I told Nelson that I didn't consider JR a friend anymore. Even Nelson didn't like what JR did. I was angry with JR for a while. Every time he would come over to see Nelson, I would give him the cold shoulder. After a while, I got over it and started to talk to JR again.

I always thought about the time that Kris went to Florida and wondered what happened between him and the guy that he was staying with. One day I got my answer. I came to find out that Kris treated him the same way he treated me. That guy wrote me to send back a letter I had written Kris.

The day before I left to go on vacation to Disney World, Kris called. He told me that because I'm not taking him to Florida, I have to make it up to him by getting him the roller blades that he wanted. The roller blades cost \$150, so he wanted me to give him the money. Kris also told me that the night we'd had dinner with JR and Nelson, JR had said to him, "I don't understand Carmelo. He misses you when you're not here, but when you are here, he acts like a jerk."

When I asked JR about what Kris had told me, JR got upset and cut me off. He said that he was sick of Kris and all the bullshit and kept on bad-mouthing Kris. I was thinking that while I'm in Florida they might get together in my house. I knew I shouldn't be thinking like that, but I just couldn't help it. I knew I might end up giving Kris the \$150 because I still wanted him. I was on my way to Florida for a vacation, and I was still thinking about Kris. What the fuck was wrong with me?

The trip to Florida was fun. We took Amtrak instead of flying. The train ride was nice but a little too long. It took us 30 hours to get there because of the many stops it made. We spent 12 days there. We got a package deal that included a car rental. Nelson was worried that we would not get the car because he didn't have a driver's license. I have a driver's license but my license stated that I needed hand controls. When we got to the rental place, I gave Nelson my license. They thought Nelson was me, so they gave him the car. For some reason, every one thinks that Nelson and I are brothers. In that situation it worked in our favor. We stayed at the Best Western Hotel. They gave us passes to the MGM studio, Magic Kingdom, Epcot Center, Sea World, and Universal Studio.

One day I played a trick on Nelson that almost made him have a heart attack. He had parked the car to go get something to eat. We were play fighting, and as he was getting out of the car I told him, "If you keep it up, I just might take the car and leave you here."

He told me to go ahead and take the car, not knowing that I would. I moved it four cars down from where it was parked. When he came back he couldn't see it right away because it was dark. He walked towards where he had parked. When he saw the car wasn't there, he panicked. I wanted to torture him so I didn't let him know where I was until I saw him heading back to the store. I beeped the horn to let him know where I was. When he got in the car he said, "I feel like kicking your ass. You scared the shit out of me."

"You told me to take the car, so I took the car. What's the problem?" I said laughing.

From that night forward, he made sure to take the car keys with him whenever he left me in the car.

Out of all the places we went to, we liked Epcot Center the best. In celebration of their 25th Anniversary, they had a fireworks display every night. We would go there after we were through with the other parks. Epcot was the one where we had the most fun. I had been to Disney World before on a high school trip, but I had more fun this time.

I had fun, but I would always think of Kris. I had wanted to take Kris, but I knew that if he had come with us, he probably would have left us flat. He would have met someone else and left with him or her. Knowing me, that would have burned me up.

The ride home was long. It took about 28 hours. We had a hard time getting home with the bags, because I had my manual wheel chair and Nelson had to push me. I was sick when I got home.

I called a guy I hired before I went to Florida. He told me he had gotten a better job, so he couldn't work for me. That Friday and Saturday, I had no one to take care of me. Luckily my ex-roommate Raheim came to help me out.

I called a guy I met on New Year's Eve named Steven when I got home. He told me he was coming over with his friend Chino that Saturday. Steven came early, and since I hadn't gotten enough sleep, I was tired. He left Chino at my place and went to work, so I couldn't go back to sleep. I was getting sick, and not getting any sleep made me sicker. Steven and Chino ended up staying over. I was lucky they came because Raheim had to leave, and I didn't have anyone to take care of me. Chino helped me out. I ended up renting him my couch because I needed someone here to help me at night. Sometimes Chino and I would smoke weed and goof around. The times we did that reminded me of the times Kris and I use to get high and goof around. Chino became like a cousin to me.

A month later, I hired a girl named Carla. I didn't know that she would help me accomplish one of my dreams. She became more of a friend than an employee, which is very rare. Sometimes when she worked, it was more like us hanging out. When I interviewed her, something told me that she would be good for me. The interview didn't even seem like an interview. It was more like two people talking and getting to know each other. She even admitted to me that she smoked weed, and so I admitted it to her. Sometimes when her shift was over, we would drive around in her van and smoke.

As you know, I always thought that Kris would try to come on to anybody, but I wanted to trust Carla. Yes, I got jealous when they were together, but I knew Carla would never do

anything to hurt or betray me. She really didn't care for Kris. She thought he was a big jerk because of the way he treated me. We would always talk about our relationships and comfort each other.

But I still didn't trust Carla with Kris because like I said before, I didn't trust anyone. Maybe it's because I was insecure or had low self-esteem. I always felt that because of my disability, I would never be able to hold onto a man or satisfy him. In a way I trusted Carla, but in the back of my mind I trusted no one.

One day Kris came over while Carla was working. I asked him how things were going with him and his father. He said that things were not so good because his father was acting like a jerk. His father wanted him to help around the house. His father wasn't going to put up with his shit. I wasn't surprised. When Kris and Carla started talking, I got upset. Carla wasn't paying attention to her job. I am a jealous person, and when I saw them together I really got pissed off. She was eating a sandwich when Kris told her that she was supposed to get a five-minute cigarette break. You know how smokers are – they always need a cigarette break. Then she said, "Well, I might as well go walk the dog."

She was walking my dog when Kris looked out the window and saw her. He asked Carla for a cigarette. He went down to get the cigarette. It took them 25 minutes to come back upstairs. I got even more pissed off and more fucking jealous.

A little while after they got back, Kris said he was leaving. I asked him if he would like me to take him to the train. Carla piped in and said she was leaving too. It was time for her to go. Then I made sure I really was going. I thought to myself, "There is no way in hell that her pussy is getting a piece of my dick." We walked Carla to the bus, and then Kris and I walked to the train. We started talking about us. I told him I couldn't stop thinking about him and that I cry for him at night. I told him I slept with the Teddy Bear because he wasn't around. Basically I told him I couldn't let him go.

He asked me what I expected from him. He admitted we needed each other and said he wanted to try again. I told him if we were going to be together, I wanted him completely and not partially. I said that if he was going to be with me, it had to be because he loved me, not because he needed somewhere to stay. He had to love me from the heart. I told him that I didn't think he would be able to do it.

During the conversation, he told me that he couldn't kiss me. He said he didn't like the way I kissed and that he didn't feel the desire to kiss me. I told him, "You see, you can't even kiss me. How are we going to have a relationship?" I told him I knew it was a lot of responsibility for someone to be with me, and that I thought it would be too much for him. As I was talking, Kris cut me off and said we should just leave it alone. He went home.

One day Dirt, Carla's boyfriend, came over and wanted to go out to play some pinball with me. Dirt, my friend Rick, and I went to the Billiard Hall to play pinball. While I was playing, they had to hold me up. When Dirt was holding me, I really enjoyed it. I was wondering why Kris couldn't be like this. Dirt was holding me with his arms under mine, and he was directly behind the wheelchair and me, and then he put his head on my shoulder. When he did that, I shut my eyes and enjoyed the feeling of a cute guy holding me so close.

I thought I got through to Kris because he called the next day saying he wanted to come over. I wanted to ask why he wanted to come, but I also wanted to tell him not to come. Instead, I

told him that he could. I thought he was going to say something about what we had talked about, but he didn't. When he came over, we got along somewhat. I felt a little uncomfortable being with him, but I got over it. I realized throughout the night that Kris and I could never be a couple. He could never be the kind of lover I would need or want. Things happened that night that showed me he wouldn't be there for me.

That night, I made up an excuse to get Kris out of the house. I told him Rick and I was going to the Stonewall bar to play Bingo. But I really wasn't planning to go out. Unfortunately, Rick didn't realize this, so he asked Kris to come with us. When I heard that, I was PISSED. I really didn't want to go out with him. But all of us ended up going. While we were playing, I was looking at Kris and asking myself if we would ever work out. Would he ever be what I needed him to be?

The answers to my questions started coming together near the end. Kris won the jackpot of \$100. At first he didn't even offer to buy us a drink until we started putting on our coats. Then he said he wanted to stay over my house, so I told him that he could. But after we were dressed and ready to go, my power wheelchair would not move. Rick agreed to push the wheelchair all the way home. Kris went to his own place instead of even offering to help. HELLO, if that isn't a wake up call, then I don't know what is. So Rick started pushing me and then he said, "Try the wheelchair again." Surprisingly, it started to work. I think it had stopped working because God was giving me a sign that Kris would not help me in my time of need. Instead of helping to push my wheelchair after it had stopped working, he decided to go home.

I told all the home attendants to tell him I was not home when he called. I decided the best way to let him go was by not speaking to him. The real question was: would I be able to do it? I just didn't know. I still wanted him, and I knew that I had to be sick.

When we got home, Rick told me that Kris asked him why Rick didn't like him. Rick told him that it was really unimportant why he didn't like him. Kris asked him what to do about me wanting more than a friendship. He said that I don't make him laugh and that we don't really talk. Rick told him that being in relationship is not always going to be laughing and talking. Sometimes people just sit back and enjoy each other's company. Rick told him that maybe all we needed to do was to sit and discuss our likes and dislikes and take it from there. Kris told him that was hard because all he wanted was friendship, but he knew I wanted more. Rick also let Kris know that he thought that Kris used me. Rick said that Kris said one thing but did another, and that he didn't really care about me. Rick told him that what he thought about him was unimportant at the time, but how I felt was important. Rick told Kris that I asked him not to get involved with my relationship with him.

One day Carla and I started talking about life and how we are responsible for our own lives and our own actions. Basically, she made me realize that I needed to change how I felt about myself, as well as the way I think. I needed to start liking myself and then maybe I would notice that my life was actually fun and not so bad after all. She made me realize that my problem with Kris was mainly because I made it that way. I was doing too much for him for the wrong reasons. I was trying to buy his love; not with money, but by trying to give him everything he wanted. At the time I didn't realize this, but now I realize that I expected him to love me because of all that I was doing for him. I took it for granted that he would automatically do the

same for me. Carla told me that if I wanted to try again with Kris, I should try to be his friend first, and see what happened from there.

As we got to know each other, I would sometimes wonder if Carla and I could get together. We both had a lot in common. I think I am bisexual. I am not going to lie. I like my share of men, but what I want could only happen with a woman because gay guys don't want relationships. All they want is a sex buddy. Besides, I don't think a gay man would have a relationship with a disabled person.

I tried to keep myself busy to get my mind off of Kris. Carla, Rick and I went to Bingo at the Stonewall one night. Rick's friend met him there. Rick's friend brought another guy with him named Leo. He was nice, but a little weird. He was kind of my type. After Bingo, we all went to have something to eat and talk. Leo and I sat next to each other. It was as if we were seeing each other. He had his arm around me like we were lovers. On the way home, Carla asked Rick if he could take me home because it was time for her to leave. Leo asked if he could push me home.

When we got to my place, I knew that if Leo and I had been alone, we would have had sex. He was touching me, and when Rick and his friend went in the other room, he took out his dick. He wanted me to grab him, and I was about to. But then Rick came back, so we couldn't do anything.

I had other men try to come on to me, but none of them could take the place of Kris. This was probably because I didn't want anyone else to take Kris's place. Kris was my first love, and I wasn't really interested in anyone else. I had guys try. I met a guy named Eddie. He would always deny that he was gay, but whenever he was with me he didn't mind fooling around. I remember the first time we had sex. He came over to my house and spent the night. He came in my room and we started talking. He sat on my bed and asked me to get out of my wheelchair and sit on the bed with him so we could talk. All of a sudden he started to kiss me, and one thing led to another. When we took off our clothes, I looked down at him. I could not believe my eyes. His Dick was so small that I thought that I was looking at a newborn baby's dick. I thought to myself, "Maybe he's a grower and not a shower." We started to caress each other, and I went down on him. I wanted to make him hard, hoping that his dick would grow bigger. It grew all right, only 3 1/2 inches. He wanted to have sex, so I went to put a condom on him. I was having trouble making the condom stay on, but I finally got it to stay. I got on top of him and tried to put his dick in me. When I got his dick in me, I couldn't move because it would fucking slide out. I felt so bad for him. He kept apologizing. I tried to comfort him by telling him not to worry about it, that sometimes that happens. It was no big deal. I thought to myself, "I thought Kris's dick was small."

My friend Steven's boyfriend Rudy liked me. He called me to tell me that he had a dream about me. The dream was about him telling me that he liked me and that he wanted to go out with me. When he said that, I thought to myself that I wouldn't mind going out with him, but it would never happen. We wouldn't be right together because of communication problems. He could only speak Spanish, and my Spanish isn't all that good. Another reason I wouldn't go out with him was because of Steven. Nothing happened between us.

One day Steve and Alfonso came over with their boyfriends. We went out and walked around the Village and the pier. I was bored as shit. I felt so out of place with them there. They were talking about doing things that I couldn't do, like going to places that weren't wheelchair

accessible, and hanging out with their other friends. I thought to myself, "What's new Carmelo? You always feel out of place."

When I got home that night, I wanted to go to bed, because I was sleepy, but no luck. Someone knocked on my door. When I first heard the door, I thought it was Kris, but it wasn't. It was Jermaine. I wanted to go to sleep, but we wound up having sex all night. I finally let him penetrate me, which he was dying to do. I thought it was going to hurt because he had a ten-inch dick, but it didn't. It just felt uncomfortable. I didn't like it anyway. Maybe it's because I didn't have feelings for him.

About a week later, the phone rang and woke me up. By the time I got to the phone whoever was calling had already hung up. I didn't know until that night when I checked the caller ID that it was Kris. I wanted to call him back, but I didn't. The next day I woke up thinking about him, so I said fuck it and ended up calling him. He told me he had called earlier, but no one picked up. He said that he had wanted to call me before, but he wasn't sure that I would speak to him. But my calling him back made it easier for him to ask. He asked me if I would let him make a demo tape, because he might work as a DJ in a bar. I told him that he could, so he came over. I could not understand why he was asking me because I just had a regular stereo system.

When he came, I told him I missed him and was happy to see him. I don't remember everything we said, but he told me that I should be thinking about going out with women because what I'm looking for I'm never going to find in a man. He told me that he likes girls; you know the same old shit. I told him that I just wanted to be his friend and be there for him when he needed me. I had to deal with my feelings of loving him without him feeling the same towards me. He thought that all I wanted was sex, so he came out and said, "So you think sex would make it better between us? Then lets do something now."

I told him no. I didn't want it like that. It had to be spontaneous. Just having sex like that won't mean anything to me. That's when I told him to forget it. I didn't want sex. I just wanted to be his friend, so he made the demo tape and left. Then I didn't hear from him for two weeks. He called to tell me that he gave the tape to the club, and that they would call him if they liked the tape. The club didn't call him.

He called me again and we started talking. He told me that he was seeing a girl. He told me we could never be. What we had was over and there was no reason why we should try again. When I heard that I said, "So why the hell are you calling me?" He said that he just wanted to talk. Of course the drama with Kris continued.

SAYING GOOD-BYE

You came into my life
like a drop of a dime.
You told me you were leaving.
I asked you why?
You said; You need to explore the world.
To see what it could give you.
But I thought I was giving you all you need.
You know if I could, I would until I bleed.
I prayed to God to make you stay,
because I know I'll miss you each and everyday.
But I know it will never end that way,
because you're leaving me anyway.
The time came when we had to say good-bye.
As you were walking out that door.
I felt like I was going to die.
But something whispered in my ear
and told me don't you cry my dear,
because the pain will pass you by.

CHAPTER 12

One day Carla came to work with bad news. She told me she was going to quit. She was going to buy a bus along with her sister and a couple of friends. They were going to travel cross-country. I told her that it had always been a dream of mine to pick up and go traveling. She asked me if I would like to go with her. I didn't think that I would be able to do it. My mouth dropped open. I was in shock. I knew that my going would be a lot of responsibility for her and the people we'd be traveling with. I asked her if she was absolutely sure that she wanted me to go with them.

Her reply was, "Why not? But first I have to get everyone's approval."

Everybody agreed that it was fine for me to go.

I was a little nervous about going. I didn't know what to expect. I knew that I would be living on the street and in the bus. We wouldn't be able to take a bath every day, and we would be eating cold food. I figured that this was my only chance to do this. I talked it over with Henry, my counselor. I told him that I was getting cold feet because I thought that I would be in the way. People would have to help me do basic things like dressing, eating, washing up, getting in and out of the bus, and a few other things that I can't do on my own. Henry told me if they thought that I was going to be an inconvenience, they would not have invited me to go along. He also made me realize that this was a once in a lifetime opportunity, and if I didn't take it I might regret it later. He also told me that I was not like the average person, nevertheless an average disabled person. I am a person who likes to take chances. He couldn't understand why I was asking for his opinion, because once my mind is made up, it doesn't matter what anybody else says. I go for it.

Kris called. I told him that I was going cross-country. He wanted me to ask Carla if he could come along. I really didn't want him to go with us, but I asked Carla anyway. She said that it was up to me whether I wanted him to go or not. I figured that this would be the perfect opportunity to try to get over Kris, so I told him no.

Everybody chipped in money to buy a used mini school bus. We were going from New York to San Francisco. It took us two weeks to get there. We painted the bus blue and yellow. Imagine nine people, one of them in a wheel chair, two nine-year-old twin girls, and a cat, on a mini school bus.

I thought that we would be meeting people. When you do something like this, you usually pick up people on the road. We did meet people, but we didn't pick anyone up.

The trip was a little hard on me. I didn't think I was going to make it. I was missing the comforts of home. I took \$250 because everybody had to chip in for gas and other things. We spent a couple of days in each city. I don't remember the cities we stopped in, except for Utah. I remember Utah because I had heard so much about it from the Mormons. I expected Utah to be more impressive. It reminded me of New Jersey, which is no big thing. We went camping in the mountains. I had a lot of fun. We told ghost stories, had a campfire, roasted marshmallows, and smoked weed. The other guys drank beer, but I am not a beer person. I'm more of a vodka person.

When we got to the Mississippi River, everyone went in, except me. I would not go in that water, because I saw bugs and everyone was complaining about nasty things crawling up their legs. I'm a faggot. I'm not into bugs or creepy crawlers. We saw the most beautiful sights and sunset in the world. I couldn't believe all the animals that I saw, like cows, horses, bulls, sheep, and other animals.

We went to a town whose population was something like 9, believe it or not. That town had a ghost house. Carla and her sister went in and two minutes later they came running out.

Whenever we drove through a town or city, if I ran into a disabled person, I would ask what their life was like. I was trying to find out if there was anywhere else besides New York that was accessible to the disabled, because the thought of leaving New York had crossed my mind a few times.

We met a few people along the way. There was one guy I liked, but I wasn't sure if he was gay or not. He worked in a map store. He hung out with Carla and me for a day. He was getting really friendly with the both of us, so I wasn't sure whom he liked more. He had a slight disability. He walked with a limp. We exchanged addresses. He wrote me once, when I got back. I wrote him back, but I haven't heard from him since.

As I said before, the trip was hard on me. I had to sleep in my wheelchair most of the time. We couldn't take baths too often. In two weeks, I took two baths. When we went into a town where one of us knew someone who lived there, we would take a bath. Believe me, the two baths I took were like heaven to me. We would stop in rest rooms along the way to wash our faces, brush our teeth, and take a birdbath. Of course that's not the same as taking a bath. It was especially hard for me. They were able to clean themselves pretty well, but my disability wouldn't let me clean myself that good. That's one of the things that I didn't like about the trip. I like to bathe every day. Another thing that I didn't like was the food. I bought canned food and had to eat it cold. And of course we would have disagreements, but they wouldn't last that long.

When we got to San Francisco, that was the end of the line for me. I'd had enough of the hippie life. I was in San Francisco for 8 hours. I decided to leave because they were going to a commune in another part of California that had deserted roads, and no hotels or rest stops. If the trip had been difficult for me, it would have gotten worse, and I knew that.

I was going to leave on Amtrak, but Carla's mother knew of an airline named Tower Air that cost a few dollars more than Amtrak. The plane was a 3-hour ride where Amtrak would have taken 3 days. I went on the plane and was bumped up to first class. I don't know why everyone makes such a big deal about first class. To me, the only difference in first class was the wide

seats. When I got home, the first thing that I did was take a shower, and sleep, and sleep, and sleep.

It took about two weeks after I got home for Kris to come into my life again. We spoke on the phone for 40 minutes, and we really had a nice talk. We talked about how we felt about things. Because of the conversation, I thought like always that he was changing the way he felt about me. He said that he had missed me and he wanted to try again, to see if we could make it work. I didn't know what to think. I wanted to believe that we could make it work, but I didn't want to fall into that trap and get hurt again. I didn't believe him. I wanted a relationship, but I didn't think he could give me what I wanted and needed, even if he wanted to.

He came for one day and stayed for three days. We had a nice time. We talked and made love twice. What happened those two nights I thought would never happen again. I never thought I would ever feel like I felt those two nights. We made love, and he held me in his arms as we talked. Then it went downhill again. He wanted to move back in. I told him that I wanted to take it slow.

I had bought a used car, a Buick. I went with Nelson to see Kris for his birthday. I bought him a watch, which he didn't like because he said it was too cheap. I paid \$30 for the watch. He said it looked like a \$10 watch. I told him to give it back if he didn't like it. Of course he wouldn't. He saw my new car. When we went for a drive, Kris said that he would like to try to have a relationship with me again. He asked me if he could drive me home and take the car for the night. He got mad because I told him that I did not trust him with the car. That started an argument. I told him that in order for me to share my life with him, or my things with him, he had to straighten up and get his life together. He said that he needed time to get his life together, at least a year. I said, "Well, I guess I'll see you in a year!" He walked away, and I drove away.

A few days later, he called again wanting to go for a drive. I really didn't want to go, but I knew if I said no that he would have given me hell, so I said okay. When I got off the phone, I noticed that Nelson had taken the car. I thought I was going to hear it from Kris when I told him that Nelson had the car. When he came and I told him, he didn't get upset. He just asked what we were going to do. We talked and ended up having sex. We spent the day together talking about us. He was telling me that he wants what he wants. He knew that he cared for me, but he was afraid that if he had a relationship with me, he might miss out on something better. Thinking about it now, I'm surprised that it didn't bother me. Maybe it's because I had heard everything from him before and I didn't believe him anymore.

We did end up going for a drive. We would argue more than anything else, mostly over the car. He would drive me crazy about the car, because I would let Nelson drive it and not him. I use to hear it every time we spoke, and I mean every time. Kris had to get his way. One day I got sick of hearing it, so I let him drive. Everything went okay. We went upstate and it was fine. I had a good time with him until we got back to Manhattan and he bumped into a cab in heavy traffic. When we got home, we started to argue about the car because the water pump blew. He wanted to act responsibly, so he gave me the money to buy a new pump. Some time after, I bought a mini van, and I was going to sell my car. Kris said he was going to buy the car from me, but he never did. I thought that I would surprise Kris by just giving him the car. I went to his house and handed him the title and told him that I wanted him to have the car. I told him that I would give him the keys once he registered the car in his name. He was happy until I told him the

part about putting the car in his name. I can't believe that I was giving him the car as a gift, and on top of that he wanted me to leave the car registration and plates in my name. We had a big argument over it, and he ended up giving me back the title. I took the title and went home. I ended up giving the car to Nelson.

Something happened between Kris and me that a normal person would not put up with. One night at about four in the morning, my friend Rick and I wanted to go to Foxwoods. I asked Kris if he wanted to go with us, and of course he said yes. Then I realized that I didn't have anyone to watch my dog. Kris offered to stay behind and watch the dog. I didn't really trust Kris, and he knew it. He would always complain that I didn't trust him. He made me feel guilty about not trusting him, so I figured that I should give him a chance to prove himself. I asked him if he was sure that he didn't mind staying with the dog, because if he did I could postpone the trip for another day. He said that he didn't mind at all, to go ahead and have a good time.

When we got back, as we were parking the car, Rick heard someone say, "They're back." We looked up and saw someone dash from the window really fast. When we got upstairs, my apartment was a mess. There were clothes all over, the bed was all messed up, and Kris had shaved off his hair and his eyebrows. When I asked Kris what was going on and whether or not he had company over, he said no, that he was alone. I saw a phone number on my nightstand and I asked Kris whose number it was. He told me it was none of my business, so I took the number and hid it. We got into a big argument. Since I would not give him back the phone number, he took my car keys. I ended up having to call the police. The police told him that he had to leave. He left but came back the next day. He admitted to me that he had a guy in the apartment with him. He went into details that broke my heart. He told me that they started making out in the living room. When things started to get hot and heavy they came into the bedroom. Kris let the guy fuck him. I was so hurt. I wanted to throw my mattress away. The thought of Kris having sex with someone else on my bed was too much for me to deal with. I couldn't believe that he had the nerve to tell me that he didn't understand why I was mad at him. He said what happened had nothing to do with me. That should have been reason enough for me to eliminate him from my life totally, but it wasn't.

Dreams

I look at your face every night.
I see what I need to see.
I watch you breathing through out the night.
You talk to someone in your dreams.
I wonder who's the one you are seeing.
I hope that it's me,
because you're saying that you love him.
I see you reaching out to him
and I want to grab you.
But I'm afraid you will turn away.
So I just kiss you on the cheek.
As I go to kiss you, you turn and
your lips turn to mine and we kiss.
Then something unexpected happens.
I wake up alone and learn,
that it was all a dream

CHAPTER 13

I had a hard time dealing with what had happened with Kris. My acting school had a summer program in Maine that I had applied to. Two weeks later I was on my way to Maine with Nelson, my Personal Care Attendant. Each session at the school lasted ten days. I stayed for about a month. They asked me to stay because they were going to have a ceremony to officially open the school. They wanted me to be the one to cut the ribbon and make the announcement that the school was officially opened. I was first page news in the Maine newspaper. While I was there, I met some cool people. In the first session, I knew most of the people, because they had all come from New York. I had a lot of fun with them. Being with them was like having one big party all the time. The second session wasn't as much fun as the first one, but it had its moments. I met a girl named Lisa. She was from California. We got to know each other fairly well. She even came to New York for vacation and stayed with me for a week. It was cool having her here and getting to know her better.

I also met a guy named Stuart who lives in Maine. We became good friends. We used to tell everyone that he was my adopted brother. His mother sometimes would ask Nelson and me over for dinner, because she knew that we didn't like the food at the school. I became very close to his family. We still keep in touch, every now and then.

I had met a guy named Dan some time before I went to Maine. We met through the acting school. He was in the school cabaret and every now and then the school would ask me to be in the cabaret. We started to date each other, when I came back from my cross-country trip. Dan contacted me to invite me to a play he was going to be in. I saw him perform, and after the play we picked up something to eat at McDonalds. Then we went to my apartment. I remember wondering if he was gay or straight. Well, that night I found out that he was gay. We had a good time talking and getting to know each other. When it was time for him to leave, I walked him to the bus stop, and before he got on the bus he gave me a kiss on the cheek. That was the start of our relationship. He was really good to me. He showed me what a caring relationship should be about. I had a lot of good times with him. We would see Broadway plays together. He took me to see the play "Chicago." I ended up seeing it about nine times.

The first Christmas we spent together he took me shopping. He saw that I needed a new coat, so the week before Christmas he bought me one. When Christmas came I wasn't expecting

any thing else from him, because he had gotten me the coat, but he surprised me by getting me some candleholders, a sweater, a CD from “Chicago,” and a bottle of cologne. I saw a commercial on television about imported beers being delivered to your door. I knew that Dan liked beer so I got him a two months’ supply. I also took him out to dinner. When we came home, we had sex and he stayed the night.

I was seeing Kris at the same time. I had told Dan about Kris and everything that I went through with him. One thing led to another, and Dan and I became a couple. I unintentionally hurt Dan because I didn’t tell Dan that I was still in love with Kris. I continued to date Dan for about a year. While I was in Maine, I began thinking about Dan and how it wasn’t fair for me to continue betraying him. When he came up to Maine for the school’s grand opening, he asked me what was wrong because I was acting very cold towards him. I told him that we’d talk when we got home.

When I got back from Maine, I heard from Kris. He came over to my apartment. One thing led to another, and Kris and I ended up having sex. I told Dan what had happened, and our relationship ended. It took us a while to become friends again, but we did. I don’t understand why I chose Kris over Dan at the time. As I mentioned before, I have a few insecurities when I’m with someone, but with Dan they didn’t surface. I felt comfortable being myself around Dan, disability and all. Now we are friends and we’re taking it one step at a time.

When I got back from Maine, I was starting to go on with my life. I started to date other guys. I began seeing a guy I met on the Internet. Nothing came out of that. I tried to be like Kris and I was thinking about using this guy, but it wasn’t me. I couldn’t use him, so I stopped seeing him.

I was getting used to not having Kris in my life. It was something like two-and-a-half months since I had last heard from him. One day I was getting ready to take a shower when the phone rang. Yvonne, one of my new Personal Care Attendants, answered it and asked who it was. When she said Kris, my reaction wasn’t what I thought it would be. I thought when he called I would be more nervous, scared, or even confused, but I wasn’t. We talked for over two hours while I was sitting in the shower naked. I was on the phone so long that Yvonne came into the bathroom and put a towel over my shoulders. It didn’t even faze me. As a matter of fact, I was on the phone so long that she fell asleep waiting for me to get off the phone.

He told me that he understood what I was trying to tell him two years ago about having your own place to live, because now he had his own place. He was on SSI. I told him that I still thought about him every day, which I did. I didn’t know if it was a good idea to tell him that, but what the fuck, it was the truth. In the beginning, we were having a nice conversation talking about the old times. Near the end, we started to disagree about our views on relationships and foods (vegetarian). He was saying that people should only hang out with, or be friends with, people who have the same interest and views on life. If people stick to their own kind, there wouldn’t be any disagreements. In a way I could understand what he was saying, but I told him that I thought that it would be more exciting for people to have different views. As always Kris had to be Kris, and Kris had to be right. I knew that we were going to get into a big argument, so I agreed with him and told him that I saw his point. I kind of did see his point about why it’s good to be a vegetarian, but not about sticking to your own kind. Before we got into a big

argument like always, I ended the conversation on a good note. He told me that he would call me again in the future to see if I became a vegetarian.

At the time my friend Anthony was going through kind of the same thing because his ex-Personal Care Attendant (a guy he was involved with) called him and left a message and a phone number where Anthony could reach him. We had a long discussion about why he should or shouldn't call him back. He ended up deciding not to call him back; he just cut the guy out of his life. I should have learned from Anthony, but I didn't.

Kris called again two weeks later. The funny thing was when the phone rang we heard the caller ID say number blocked. I have a talking caller ID and it says what the number is out loud. Yvonne said, "Wouldn't it be funny if it was Kris?" It was. We ended up talking on the phone for another two hours. This time, we weren't talking; we were arguing most of the time. Kris is closed-minded. I didn't get anywhere with him. Why did I waste my time on a hopeless cause? Is it because I was fucking brain dead or just lonely? I think I was fucking brain dead.

I talked to my counselor Henry about the phone call and he made a good point. I asked him why I couldn't give up on Kris. He said that since I get what I want 90% of the time, maybe Kris is a challenge for me. He also said I thought I could change Kris, but Kris is a person who will never change the way he is. If he did change, it wouldn't be that much. It wouldn't be the way I needed him to be because he's not capable.

That night after I spoke to Kris, I couldn't sleep. I needed to say something to him. In a past conversation, Kris mentioned his e-mail address and I memorized it right away like an idiot. This is what I wrote:

Hi Kris! I hope this is your e-mail. I have to say one thing to you, and I don't have your phone number, so I can't call. In a way, I don't want to have it. I realized that I have to let you go. I see from our last talk that I'm not the one you need or want, so no matter how much I want you to be my lover, I need to realize that's not what you want and I have to live with that. It might be right for you to think that two people who have different views are not right for each other. I disagree with that. It's the way you want to live, and that might be right for you. I want you to be happy, and it looks like I can't do it. What I'm trying to say is that I might agree with you about some things, but I'm not going to agree with you 100%, and you are looking for someone who does. Good luck, and I hope you find the one who agrees with you the way you want them to. I'm going to miss you, because I did and I do love you like I never loved anyone in my life. One thing I think you need to know is that I used to dream that you could be the one I wanted to laugh, cry, fight, go through everything with, but you don't think that we are right for each other. I can't and I'm not going to keep trying to make you see that two different people can live happily together. I want you to be happy by not fighting with you anymore. Maybe in time we could see eye to eye. Maybe not in everything, but maybe in some things. Until then I don't think we should speak to each other. I will always love you no matter what. Maybe later in life we could be friends. I would like that, but for now you need to find what's going to make you happy, good luck. Carmelo. . .

This was his response.

I've received your mail obviously. You say you want to do everything with me, except agree with me. Granted you say you're going to be a vegetarian now, but what about when you would make fun of me when I was telling you? I said that I would have worked for you and how we could share the money and travel together, but you didn't want to. You say that you want to travel, and you could if you got a home attendant who would go with you. I would have. This might sound mean, but do you really think you're going to be an actor? Do you really think karate is worth the expense? These are things that real friends will say. My point is if I were you, I would be living your life differently. These are issues that will not be resolved by saying "we're different." This is what you can't understand!

I didn't respond to his e-mail, so he wrote again saying:

It's okay that you haven't responded. I think that deep down you know that even if you agreed with me or had me work for you, it still wouldn't work. In reality I think you're doing the right thing. It's just that you don't realize why. Of course, you can respond and we can be e-mail friends or not. If you do respond, and if you can find out, I was wondering if Wendy has ever had a same sex experience.

Wendy is a lady I met in a club one day. My nickname for her is "tit woman." I call her the tit woman because of how we met. I went to a nightclub with Rick called Twirl. I was outside waiting to get in the club when she came over to me. We were talking when the doorman came to take me inside. She told me that she would see me inside. I didn't think anything of it. After being inside for an hour, she came over and started dancing with me. She had a few drinks and she exposed her chest to me. I was like, okay this woman doesn't know that I'm gay, but I'll go with the flow. She got on my lap and started dancing with me. Before the night was over we exchanged phone numbers. The next day when I got home, I called her but she wasn't home. I didn't leave a message because I don't like leaving messages when I have just met the person, because of my speech impairment. I don't think they can understand me on the machine. Sometimes I don't even understand myself on the machine, so imagine when it's someone I just met. She ended up calling me the day after, inviting me to see "Miss Saigon." One thing led to another, and we became good friends. I didn't get to go to the play with her because I was doing a performance that night. Wendy always calls me whenever she goes somewhere that I would be able to get into. We always celebrate our birthdays together by going out to a club with her friends. I thank God that I met her; she's been a real cool friend to me.

One day Kris and I went to a party that she gave, and Kris thought that she had the hots for him. Kris told me that he could tell that Wendy was dying to kiss him. When I went and told Wendy, she started laughing. She told me that she was just trying to make him feel comfortable. There were a lot of people there that Kris didn't know and she noticed that he was acting insecure. She wanted him to feel more at home. So back to my response to Kris's email question: so Kris, why are you interested in knowing if Wendy has ever had a same-sex experience? Is it any of your business, for it surely is not MY business. About being e-mail friends, NOT! Why,

you may ask? Because it's not going to do me any good having a friend who thinks that he is different from me. You were the one who said that two people with different views couldn't get along as friends. Even though I don't agree with you about this, you're entitled to your opinion. If that's the way you want to be, then 'more power to you, brother.' Love you always. I hope you find what you want. You just might have lost it.

Kris e-mailed me this:

You ask why I asked about Wendy. You seemed mad that I asked. Was she mad or did you not ask her? I wonder why someone you said was happy that we are talking would mind me asking her a simple question. Unless I'm not aloud to ask her. I don't know why that would be. I mean, I'm sure she knows a lot about me through you. I guess that is okay. You don't want to e-mail each other. Why? Oh yeah, why am I interested or what gives me the right to ask about Wendy? Is that the problem? You know that you tell her about me. Hell, you tell so many people about me. Is that okay? I'm not mad at you, but you know that instead of trying to dog me you could try to open up to what I'm saying. Not because we'll be together if you do but because your next relationship might be better for it. Once again, the question to Wendy was not to make you or her mad, but because I was interested in her because she was your friend. Write back or not; it is your call."

I decided that I had had enough of this game that Kris and I were playing with each other, and I needed to go on with my life. I finally woke up and realized that I have to be comfortable with being alone, until I find the right person. I haven't heard from Kris. It's been almost a year now. But he still comes to mind at times. The other day was his birthday and I was going to e-mail him a birthday card, but after some serious thought I decided not to. I didn't want to open myself up to that trap again. Anyway, I'm happy that I've gotten to the point where I can think about him, but not contact him. I have no hard feelings towards Kris. I wish him the best.

As I wrote this book, the stuff that I wrote about Kris and me made me realize that I was so stupid, but I still love him. A part of me always will. Four years have gone by and I'm still saying the same old shit. I feel somewhat different about him. Come to think of it, the reason that I put up with this relationship the way I did is probably because of the way the gay population reacts towards disabled people. As I said before, being gay and disabled is like being a Chihuahua in a Great Dane's world. I say that because gay men are into the physical aspects of a person. I've been out now for almost nine years. Before I came out, I really thought that I would be able to find someone to share my life with. It's hard enough for a heterosexual disabled person to find someone. It's almost impossible for a gay disabled person. Sometimes I wish I never came out because of the way gay men react towards me. There have been many guys I have liked or have been sexually attracted to who would have gone out with me if I wasn't disabled. Since I'm disabled, they don't. When they look at me, I think they see someone they don't want to be. A lot of gay men are so into the physical side of a person, instead of the psychological and emotional side. So if you don't have a perfect body, they don't want to deal with you. I think they are afraid of me. In a gay world it's all about the way you look, about how perfect your face and body is. A lot of gay men are insecure. When they face the reality that they are not perfect and that they are losing their looks, they get scared. So when they see me I remind them of their insecurities.

Sometimes I believe that I would be better off not being gay. I have dreams of meeting someone, falling in love, and having a family, but I know that's not going to happen in the "gay world." It might be possible if I was straight, lesbian, or even bisexual. A part of me thinks that I am bisexual. I'm attracted to certain females, and wouldn't mind having a relationship with them. I need to venture more into this part of my life, for women seem more compassionate and accepting than gay men.

When I met Kris, I really fell in love with him. I thought I had met the man of my dreams. That's all it was, a dream and a fantasy. That's why it was so difficult for me to let go. A dream or a fantasy is hard to give up or let go of.

I also think it had something to do with the way I grew up. As you read in this book, I grew up in a dysfunctional family. Throughout my life, I saw people who were supposed to love each other mistreat each other emotionally, verbally and sometimes physically. My family wasn't ready for a disabled child, so they did not know how to show me love. Since they had too much to deal with in their own lives, they did the best they could. At least my mother tried to give me the best life that she could. Some people give their child up for adoption when they find out that they have a disabled child. I had a difficult life, but it also had good moments. For me, that's good enough. Why blame a person for something that has already happened to you? It is not going to change anything, or change who you are. Hatred only causes more problems. People ask me if I could go back in life and be "normal" or change my life, would I? My answer to that is, "No!" Because that would mean that I wouldn't be the person I am. I like who I am. Being disabled makes me see life in a different way. Also, I think if I wasn't disabled, I might not be alive because I might have started to use drugs and ended up with an overdose or AIDS. It may sound bizarre, but I thank God for my life – even for making me disabled. The only thing that I find difficult about being disabled is the way people jump to the conclusion that if I'm disabled, I'm also stupid. I understand that people don't mean to be rude; it's just that they don't know how to react. They would rather ignore me than take a few minutes to get to know me. Those are the only times I wish I wasn't disabled. What's the use of wishing to be something you are not?

There were three situations that showed me that life could change. In one I thought I was going to die. One day I was going to see my mother in Queens, and as I was walking, I was listening to my walkman. I normally walk on the streets instead of the sidewalks. It's a lot easier for me because not all corners have curb cuts. I was halfway down the block, when all of a sudden I heard a dog barking. I stopped and looked around. I didn't see anything, so I continued to walk. The barking started again. This time when I looked around, I noticed a dog standing across the street on the corner. I said to myself, "Don't worry. Ignore the dog and keep on walking, and he will probably go away." I started to move my wheelchair again, and the dog started barking again. It seemed like the more I moved the wheelchair, the angrier the dog got. I didn't know what to do, so I turned around and went back. As I was turning around, I noticed that the dog was getting ready to run towards me. When I saw that, I cried out to God, "Please God, help me!" As I said that, a car drove by, and that made the dog turn away. Once the car left, the dog turned towards me and started walking in my direction again. I called out to God again, and another car appeared from the opposite direction. It made the dog go back, and when it did, I asked God to please get that dog away from me. I guess God heard me because the dog looked

away from me as if something had caught his attention. Then he left. I turned my wheelchair around and ran like hell. I thought that was my ass. I was going to be a can of Alpo.

The other two have to do with me building up my self-esteem. First I met a guy name Antonio from Hawaii. We met on the Christopher Street pier. I was walking Wolfe, my new dog. Wolfe went up to him and we started talking. We talked for like two hours, exchanged cards, and I told him that I had to go. He asked which way I was going. When I told him, he asked if he could walk me. We walked, and as we were getting closer to the house I asked him if he wanted to come in. I don't normally bring people to the house that I just met, but since I felt comfortable with him I invited him up. We went up and I had a good time. We just talked, held each other, and looked at pictures. Nothing sexual happened. The only thing that happened was that we kissed. We even took a picture together with my camera. He held the camera in front of us and took the picture. We spent like eight hours together, but it was the best 8 hours I had had in a long time. The only thing that I didn't like was that he had to go back home the next day. He called me that morning ten minutes before he had to board the plane. He said that he wanted me to go to Hawaii to see him. We e-mailed each other a few times, but nothing came out of it. I treasured that night for a long time, even though I might never hear from him again.

Second, Anthony found a Web site. It's an escort service. Anthony had arranged a meeting with one of the escorts, so I took a look at the site. I wrote to a few, and they all charged \$150 and up. Except for this one guy named Paul. I let all of them know that I am disabled and Paul told me that he understood that most disabled people couldn't afford it, so he would be willing to come for free. As I mentioned before, I'm self-conscious about my disability, especially my speech impairment. So I wanted him to hear the way that I sound on the phone in case he wanted to change his mind, so I made sure we talked on the phone. We made a date to meet and when the day came I was so nervous. I didn't know what to expect. I made sure that I took a bath two hours before he came. When he knocked on the door, and I opened the door, he greeted me as if he already knew me. That made me feel a little more comfortable. I didn't know what to say. I just invited him in. He came in and put his bag down and sat on the couch. We started talking and we both were starting to feel more comfortable with each other.

After 20 minutes, I told him to go into the bedroom. When we got into the room, he asked me if I needed help to get on the bed. I was a little uncomfortable asking him to help me onto the bed. I thought that he was going to be turned off, but he wasn't. He helped me onto the bed, and he took off my sandals and my clothes. Then he took off his clothes. We stayed in our underwear. He laid me down on the bed and he got on top of me, and we started to kiss. He really was kissing me. I couldn't believe that he was kissing me for such a long time. When he stopped, he sat up and started to caress me and rub my body. I was lying there trying not to get nervous so that my body wouldn't start tensing up, but the way he was touching me made me relax. I couldn't believe that he looked like he was enjoying what he was doing and that he was comfortable with me. That made me feel comfortable. After 20 minutes, we took off our underwear and I told him that I wanted him to lie down and let me massage him, and he did. He laid down on his back, and I started to massage his chest.

I went to kiss him to see if he would kiss me back, and he did. Then I asked him to turn on his stomach, so I massaged his back. While I was doing that we were talking and getting to know each other. It felt so right being with him. I started to rub his head. I found out that he

really likes his head rubbed. I layed on top of him for a second and I kissed him on the cheek. I couldn't believe that this was going on. It was like a dream to me. Here is somebody that I found attractive, really enjoying what I was doing to him. He really didn't mind when my body would tense up. Normally when I tense up, I get self-conscious and I think I'm going to move wrong and hurt the person. I guess it's because when I was with Kris and I would move wrong, Kris would get mad at me and tell me off. Paul made me feel so at ease. We were so into each other that I couldn't believe it. It really felt good. As I lay next to him, he turned on his side with one hand under his head and started to touch me and caress me with his other hand. I went to hug him and he hugged me back. We stayed like that for a minute, and he started to kiss me again. He really liked kissing me and that surprised the shit out of me. Dan and other people said they liked the way I kiss, and so did Paul, and I liked the way he kissed me. Paul and I were lying next to each other and acting as if we were lovers. He would touch my face real softly. Then he sat between my legs and started to caress my body again. He was so gentle. I don't know how to explain how he made me feel. I was surprised at how relaxed my body was. I was able to enjoy what he was doing to me.

After, I thought that he would say that he had to leave, but he didn't. He laid next to me and held me. For a second the scent of Kris came to mind. But it was only for a second. Then Paul said that he wanted to read the poems I had written that were hanging on the wall, so he did. While he was reading my poems, I looked at him and thought to myself if this is a dream, please don't wake me up. After he read the poems, he got his clothes and started to get dressed. He helped me put my clothes on and he told me that he would like to do this once a month. He said that he really felt comfortable with me and that he would like to come by and watch some of my video collection with me. We found out that we have similar interests. It really surprised me that he wanted to come back and hang out with me. I guess he really enjoyed my company. The way that Paul made me feel that night was something that I had never experienced before. For the three hours that we were together, he made me feel a closeness that I never had felt before, not even with my family. We still keep in touch with each other.

Those two incidents made me see that it is possible for me to be loved by someone that I am attracted to. I know that those two guys were just passing through my life, and that it wasn't a real relationship, but what I felt was love to me, and if I could feel it then, I could feel it again someday. It made me realize that anything in life is possible, and it gave me hope. As I always say, "You never know!"

It took me nine years to write this. I wrote this book to let you know that no matter what you are going through, you are not alone. Someone is going through the same thing that you are. Never give up hope, because without hope there's nothing left.

Surprise

People look at us as if we're retarded.
They don't even try to find out about us,
Just because we are different.
We come down to earth not knowing what is ahead of us.
At first we see the world as an adventure.
As time goes by we learn that we are going to need help from the world.
They want to lock us up, for they don't know how to deal with us.
How can we show you that we are just like you?
The only thing is we walk in different shoes.
The only thing we want to do is open your eyes,
And see us for who we are.
You might be surprised.