

***Picking
Up the
Pieces***



-Rebekah Faith

September 1

There and Back Again.

Why the homeless - remain homeless.

Imagine that you are restarting your life from nothing. That you were able to find a new job, but everything you own has just been destroyed in a fire. Image you have only you - and your loved ones. No pets, no clothes, no food, no shelter, no hot water, no electricity. Perhaps someone, out of kindness, gave you a tent, six shirts, three pairs of pants, five sets of underwear, a way to make hot water - and that is all. Imagine you are "there."

Imagine that while you are trapped in this meager lifestyle, you must constantly endure the pressure of needing to maintain the facade that you are just like everyone else. Maintain the facade that you own a TV, and that you saw last night's network shows, that you shop where they shop, that you buy what they buy, that you have decent, comfortable clothes that fit, that you have money in your pocket... that you, are just like everyone else.

Imagine that you must maintain this facade sixty hours a week, six days a week. The facade that you live in the same old "yuppie, comfort-zone" world as your peers. Never let it slip, never let it be discovered that although you work a nine to five "Regular Joe" job, you are nothing more than a "homeless bum" in disguise.

It is so difficult to keep up the facade that must be maintained for one to be allowed "back again." The façade that must be maintained to enable someone to climb back up the corporate ladder.

This, my friends, is the very essence of "there and back again." This is why once people fall down, they stay down.

This is one of the reasons that we still have so many homeless in America.

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With loving thanks to my boyfriend, my friends and my family. Without each and every one of them I would not have lived to tell this story.

-Rebekah Faith

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Preface:

This is a story about a time in my life which drastically changed my views on myself, the world, and others around me. It is a story about the strength that individuals have to persevere through difficult circumstances, and the toll that these circumstances take on the mind and body. It is a story of the ability of mankind to adapt and survive, if given any available support structure. I have tried to do my best to provide an accurate retelling of events and emotions by using journal entries to tell this story from the "as it is happening" perspective where one is anxiously awaiting the next turn; rather than telling the events after the fact using the clear-sighted gift of hindsight as circumstances are viewed from the authors chair. I hope this paints a more accurate picture of the events as they were happening, and gives a clearer recount of a situation that can be overcome.

Chapter 1:
California – The End of the Line

April 19, 2004 *Well, it finally happened*

What I feared would happen, finally happened. A three month computer programming contract couldn't last forever, could it? I've been stagnating at this job for nearly three years in seemingly endless three month increments. Working with technology that grows more archaic every day, as my mind wastes away begging for something new and interesting to do. But now, it is finally over. Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Who can tell? My boss is giving me two weeks to train my replacement. That's nice of him. I'll be able to earn the money I need to float me until I can find my next job.

Now, only one question remains. What is my best chance for survival? California, Arizona or Pennsylvania?

Dead man walking...

According to numerology today is my nine day. The day of closure. Completion. The end of things. Well, from the looks of things, I guess there may be something to numerology. God, I wish this day would end!

As I walk around the hallowed halls of my office place, I can almost hear a distant echo of a voice that repeats, "Dead man walking. Dead man walking here." My brain is in panic mode. I have nothing in savings, and I've lost my job. Thankfully, I have two weeks to find something else. I am grateful for that. My boss said he wants to talk to me later today about getting in as many hours as I can in the next two weeks. Talk about cool!

But, can I find another job in two weeks? What do I do about my apartment in California? If I don't find something that starts in exactly two weeks, I will be evicted. They give three day pay or quit notices in these parts.... So, should I put in my thirty days notice now?

Not only do I have myself to look out for, I've got Gilgamesh (my lizard) and my new boyfriend. If I don't find something else, we'll all be homeless. My ears are ringing again. "Dead man walking. Dead man walking here."

Should I try to take a car loan so I might have a reliable means of transportation, a makeshift home and emergency storage? Makes sense, I suppose. If I apply and I don't get it, I'll be no worse off than I am now. But I think I should wait for tomorrow to fill out the applications. Tomorrow is my "one" day. The day of new beginnings.

After the dead man's end is a new man's beginning.

April 20

Here's the plan.

By April 30th I will no longer be employed, so here's my plan. I already know I will have to be in Philadelphia for an auto accident deposition in three weeks. If I stay in California, or move anywhere else, I'm going to have to take a week off unpaid from any new job, and buy plane tickets and pay for car rental out of pocket.

If I stay in California, I'm going to have to look for a new place to live. My rent is too expensive (\$900 per month) and my landlady came over last night to look at the broken dishwasher and informed me that I'm not allowed to have any "roommates."

Anywhere I go, even if I stay in California where I don't know ANYONE, I will need to find a new job and a new place to live. I have friends and family in both Pennsylvania and Arizona who can help me out, but best of all, I've lived in Pennsylvania almost my whole life, so the Philadelphia recruiters know me and they know my work. I've made a point of keeping in touch with them over the last three years.

After hours of deliberation, my boyfriend, Kevin and I decided that due to the placement of current events and karma, it would be prudent to look for jobs in Philadelphia first, then Arizona, then California. I've submitted to the recruiting agencies that I used to work for. I'll be following up with them at lunch to let them know that I will be in Pennsylvania in just fourteen days.

Now I must tackle my car situation. My current car won't drive more than one hour without overheating, and it certainly won't make long distances to Philadelphia or Arizona. I'm going to try and get a car loan tonight for a used car with cargo space, and if that doesn't work out, I'm going to be looking online for ads where someone wants to move their car or truck from the west coast to the east coast. As a last resort, I'll have to do a one way car rental. I can probably find a long distance rental for as low as \$400, and I might be able to sell Christine, my bastard overheating pile of bolts, to pay for the rental.

So that is the current plan. I'm packing up and I will be out of California in ten days. I have only ten days to sell nearly everything I own, line up a new job, line up a place to live, and a car. Wish me luck.

April 21, 2004

So we shall see...

I have nine days left before the end of the line in California. I plan to be in Pennsylvania in just thirteen days. I'm still hunting for jobs, or as I like to call them "Monsters™," through websites and recruiting agencies. I called one of my Philadelphia recruiting companies, they have nothing new in now, but they love me. They promised they would let me know if something came in. I called another recruiting company; they were in back to back business meetings today with regional managers and clients. I left a message with someone I've previously worked with, gave all of the information including where to find my updated resume, and said I'd be calling back tomorrow. I applied for five jobs online, and I'm applying for more now.

I went looking for a car. I couldn't find any place open near me in the local auto trader, so I just started randomly driving down the road until I was beckoned by a bright, boisterous, red and white sign which read, "Credito Facil – Easy Credit" I instinctively knew it was a place that might understand me and understand my needs.

I pulled up to the lot. The lights appeared to be on, even though the hours on the office window said they had closed two hours ago. It was now a dimly lit 8 PM, traffic was winding down, yet three cheerful looking gentlemen were in the main office laughing happily and shooting the breeze. It looked as if they were good friends who made a regular practice of spending their evenings and weekends at the shop just talking about life, the wives, the kids, and hashing out friendly wagers over forty nine card decks. I say forty nine card decks, because I imagine that each is missing two straight flushes and a three. I walked on up, and one of the gentlemen came out to greet me. I couldn't believe he was still working. I noticed that they had closed two hours ago. He said those ever so famous words that are said by the nice salespersons: "Nonsense! If you want to buy a car tonight, I want to sell a car tonight."

He asked what I was looking for, and of course I told him exactly what I needed. "I need a car that can pack a lot of stuff, and travel the open road for miles and miles." So he showed me the car that was in the very front of the lot, waiting for me, as if it had known I would come for it tonight. It was a polite little, rugged little, plenty 'o packin' little... minivan. Let me say that again. MiniVAN! (blech!)

I never dreamed that I would be the minivan type of chick. Harley chick, YES, Honda even. I could maybe bend my rules so far as to be a mustang chick provided that said mustang was born before 1972. As far as the old cars go, I am a die-hard "Chevy Girl." As for the new cars, well, the Japanese SUVs have been ringing my bells as of late. I just CAN'T BELIEVE that I could possibly end up a "minivan road warrior!" The thought is just... repulsive. But in the interest of necessity, the minivan is cheap. It should be big enough to travel with the stuff I'm taking. And if the worst should occur, it should be big enough to live in until I find a real home.

Now I'm just waiting for the results of the credit application. The finance person told me that I had A1 credit before I moved to California....but the maelstrom that is California did its job extremely well. It sucked all the money, life, happiness and good credit out of me. Right now, I have no choice but to pray for the gods of alternative financing to look favorably upon my plight.

For nearly two years now, I've been talking about my lifelong dream of contracting around the country in three to six month intervals and then finding the most beautiful forty acres, settling down, having a nice little work at home programming or web designing job, an evening singing gig, and building my own little cottage.

On Monday, I believe fate stepped in to help me live my dream. There's nothing left to do, but keep applying, keep calling, and keep trekking. I have nine days left before the end of the line in California. I plan to be in Pennsylvania in thirteen days. Tomorrow is another day, another chance to make good on my needs for my new journey. At the very least, I need a drivable car, a new home, and a new job. I shall wake up early tomorrow, at "O-Dark-Thirty" again and continue on my quest.

Today was the day of new beginnings.

April 22, 2004

Why bother?

Today I'm in a very masochistic mood. I know deep down that this is a test of faith, and that I will be OK, but physically I feel like I'd rather both my wrists were slit and I was slowly bleeding mercurous oxide.

I am so down. I am in a dark, black, pit of solitude dug into the deepest recesses of the earth, the only out are unsteady vines of hope covered in crude oil. There is no ladder. (As they said in **The Matrix**, "There is no spoon.") There is no earth. They are only the manifestations of the energies which surround me - and right now those energies are morbidly dark.

Even though I promised myself that I would make recruiting calls at noon, I know that in my present mood, this is NOT the time to be on the phone selling myself. I don't feel good at all. I'm hoping the reason I feel this way is only because I was up all night with back pain, and I've had no sleep. I'm hoping its not something deeper. But the craziest, most messed up thoughts keep going through my head. Like, "How 'bout I take a part time job at Del Taco™ and live in a stairwell? Sleep on any section of the concrete steps that is not urine-stained, and prop my head against the steel door for a pillow. I could hide a towel and three changes of clothes in a backpack, launder them in restrooms, and sit all day in parks during my days off watching people avoid glancing at my stained, worn face." Why does this vision seem so incredibly euphoric to me right now?

I just don't care about anything right now. Not even myself. I could just cry. The world is beautiful, life is full of opportunities, so why do I want to just die? Why is it that watching an episode of **Angel** on the television - watching the hell of someone having their heart torn out and dying every day strongly appealed to me? Why should I be glamorizing and hoping for the pain of another portrayed in a fictional farce?

Picture still in scanner.

Fluffy Pink Bunnies

In a small black life, your life
where even the darkest thoughts linger unwilling,
anxious to be on their way
In your heart denying hopes and wishes
a crumbling spirit stands protected by
diamond studded chain-mail.

Forget the love, the friends who come and go;
Inside you're plagued by a hurricane
and the silent whispers of ancestors long gone
- too far gone to care.
Even a million years couldn't change the past.

Forget the bitter cold days to come,
the monotonous grind of life;
accept the small green gem
left behind in Pandora's box
the gentle reminder that there is hope.

Art and parody poetry* by Rebekah Faith

*Parody poetry based off Adam Zagajewski's "The Greenhouse"

April 23, 2004

Pennsylvania here we come...

Insert music notes here: "Pennsylvania here we come; right back where we started from...." I moved to California from Pennsylvania in a brand new Subaru Forester, and I'm leaving in a \$1400 minivan. Hmm. It sounds like the makings of a good country song. OK, I promise not to torture y'all too bad. *End music notes.* The next three months will be absolutely blissful, I KNOW it!

So I didn't get the \$4000 minivan. The auto loan was not approved. The dealer said I had A1 credit before moving to California, but like I said, "The maelstrom that is named California did its job extremely well. It sucked all the life, love, money and good credit right out of me." The rejection notice I got in the mail said I was declined due to "CHRONIC delinquent credit." Chronic.... *Insert **Beavis and Butthead** moment here: "Tee, hee, hee!. They said Chronic!" * Isn't "chronic" a brand name for marijuana?! Oh dear!

To make a long story short, the auto dealer said he could finance another, cheaper, different van himself - with 0% interest. I bought it today. A \$1400 Plymouth van, with \$700 down, and post-dated checks for four months, May through August, \$240 each. Yes I know that comes to almost \$1700, I'm not THAT mathematically challenged, but taxes, and tags... OK, I bought the car. But I shall be traveling across the country with plenty of duct tape, wire, bubble gum, and a "Triple A Auto" membership, just in case.

In other news - My father heard that I was coming to PA and wrote me a message that said, "I heard you were coming to Pennsylvania. I wanted to let you know that you are not welcome to stay here. Please make other arrangements." So I responded in kind: "Dear dad. You already made that perfectly clear in your last contact with me. The only reason I would stop by is to take you out for a nice dinner. Best, -your daughter"

Not to worry. My best friend in Philly said that Kevin and I would be welcome to use her couch for a week - as long as things (on her couch) were kept G rated. I said not a problem, If we need to do any "NC-17 material" we'll cover the kitchen floor with a neoprene blanket, and clean up after ourselves before you get home from work."

So, I now have a car that might make it to Philadelphia, will be roomy enough to pack stuff and sleep in, AND my best friend in Philly, Sarah has granted me a week to get it together once I'm there. I think that's all this little Pookah* will need.

*Pookah – A mischievous spirit in Celtic mythology that usually appears to men in large animal form. A Pookah is famous for playing tricks on people, using embarrassment or the unexpected to catalyze the betterment of the individual.

April 24, 2004

Holding a moving sale...

Its so sad to go through everything you've ever owned, and decide what to get rid of. Like any turtle with a long journey ahead, I must take with me only what can fit in my new shell. There is no room for the pack-rat in my new life where I travel across country. I will be carrying with me only what items I can fit in my little minivan.

All those precious little treasures, like my **Red Dwarf** video collection (wasn't I just ecstatic when I found a "Mr. Fribble" penguin to go with it?) will have to go. I shall remember - like momma Fortuna and the Harpy in **The Last Unicorn**, that they were once mine. I will always have that.

Its so true that possessions own you, and not the other way around. I feel like I'm giving up little pieces of myself as I sell off everything that once meant the world to me. But what have these items, these little mini metaphoric "spiritual-connectors" and "energy-shields" have to do with who I am as a spiritual being? Nothing. So why is it so sad that I am freeing myself at the expense of these temporary little treasures which will eventually return to dust anyway?

April 30, 2004

My last day at work

I haven't written for a while. I've been overwhelmed with packing and moving and running around frantically, so this will be a long one.

Wow, what a day! Everyone at work told me I needed more than two weeks to train my replacement. I thought they were wrong. Yes, I was responsible for a lot, I supported many different departments with their own customized applications. I thought I could train any little "techno-geek" on my programs in less than a week, but this wasn't just any little "techno-geek." This... was Joe Jr.

My boss hired someone just as stonewalling, just as probing with trivial, meaningless, academic questions as he is. Hence the name, Joe Jr. He stopped me every five minutes to ask trivial, probing questions about process, departments and datasources that come from other developers. Trivial!!! He wasted a time on questions that were along the lines of, "...and who is her manager, and why is it named, 'Blah' and where do THEY get the information from..." Everything he doesn't need to know to run my procedures in the right order and analyze the data.

On another subject. I think I've learned something that I hope I never ever forget. I have always been this type of person that just doesn't like mornings. I am a night person. Midnight is high noon for me. When I was in grade school, and high school, I was always late. I could never get up earlier than 7 am. I used to say, "Look, my heart doesn't start beating until 7 am and that's that!"

For a while I thought there was something wrong with me. Why was I the only one in the class that couldn't make it into first period. Why was I the only one at work that couldn't make it in on time? Sometimes I feel like there is a drill sergeant in my head calling me lazy. This overbearing patriarchal voice saying I'm slothful and that I'll never amount to anything. Telling me that I must change myself to fit in with the "normals," with normal society.

Then I hear about my friend's mom, Lilah. She made a pact to herself a long time ago, that she would never take a job where she had to be up before 11 AM. and she made a very lucrative living for herself, after 11 AM! This is someone who deserves to be respected. She realized who she was, what she needed, and respected herself enough to make it work.

Then I have another friend, Mary, also a night person who forces herself to wake up at 5 AM every morning. She takes care of two children and her husband; and she couldn't be more miserable. When I told her about what I was going to set out to do, that I was about to start my journey contracting the country three to six months at a time, she told me she was so jealous. She secretly confided in me that she dreams of telling her husband that she's leaving, she doesn't want the responsibility anymore, she's leaving the kids, and him, and going far away. After this dream, she wakes up in a cold sweat, beating herself up, thinking about what a horrible mother she is. I love her to death, but I really hope she can work things out so that she can be happier soon.

So this brings up the question, "What animal am I?" I already know the answer. I am the contracting animal. I am the animal that can get up at 7, 6, 5, hell - even 4 AM for about three months at a time. I am the animal that regularly works until 2 AM, 3 AM, I've even been in the office working overnight until 6 AM! I am the animal that works for three days straight on your project without sleeping. But I am NOT the animal that you depend on to be in the office from 8:15 to 5:15, five days a week for more than three months - without a good reason.

I realize who I am, so now what do I do with it? Well, I start my journey. What I've always wanted to do. Three to six month contracts around the country, and around the world. Independent consulting from place to place. I realize I am the tiger, not the cattle or the zebra. Trying to paint my yellow stripes white, and make me wear hoof-shoes, only works for so long until the paint thins, and the shoes wear down.

But at least I recognize the beast that I am. And I finally recognize that there is nothing wrong with me. The drill sergeant in my head is WRONG. I am perfect just the way I am. I am just a different animal.

For my last day at work the marketing department took me out to a Japanese restaurant. They presented me with me a going away card and a \$100 AMEX gift certificate; and my own department bought me a big cake, a card, and gave me a carnation lei with \$250 folded in between the fragrant flowers. Even though my own boss was not present for my send off and did not sign the card, I KNEW that other people realized the beast that I was, and loved and accepted me for it.

There's a wise old saying, "Its better to be hated for what you are, than loved for what you are not" I am so grateful, that the people in my life loved me for what I was. I was so overwhelmed, I started crying. And now I start my journey.

Chapter 2:

The Open Road

May 4, 2004

On the road again....

The first three days of my new journey....

Friday was my last day of work. While I was packing the van Friday night, I quickly realized that there would not be enough room for everything I wanted to take with me from my one bedroom apartment. It appeared that in my new life I would need to be the turtle, and take only what can fit in the shell - so to speak. Much to the chagrin of my boyfriend, I expressed the urgency to unpack and repack the van. The goal was to take out everything that was already packed that was not a necessity. Well, I felt really badly about it, because he spent over a day and a half packing what was already there, but there are things more important in life than a ton of microbiology, science, and computer books. So we unpacked, sorted through everything, and re-packed only the necessities into the van. I was leaving a whole room of my life behind in California, but that's the way it had to be.

We took a packing break and went to pick up my dearest friend in California, Leanne. I still had some of her stuff in the house and her car was in the shop, so if I couldn't deliver it to her, it would mean that it all would have to get thrown out. So we had some more packing, some hauling, a forty-five minute trip out to get Leanne, and a forty-five minute trip back. Of course this meant that she was going to help us finish packing the van and cleaning the house. We got back to the house at 3:45 AM, packed some more, cleaned, took a quick nap, and finally, Leanne had to leave at 2:30pm on Saturday.

I said good-bye to my closest friend in California on 2:30 in the afternoon, Saturday May 1st. I felt sad, but didn't cry. Somehow I knew that this was only a temporary separation. Leanne and I will see each other again, I'm sure. After she left, my boyfriend and I continued, without sleep, packing and cleaning until 10 PM Saturday night.

At 10 PM Saturday, we headed out on the road to meet my mother, stepfather, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle, and brothers in Phoenix. After driving all night and taking a quick rest stop we arrived in the Phoenix area at around 10 AM. We made a spare key for the van to protect against the most likely sleep deprived idiot emergency of locking the keys in the car during a long road trip. We hit the AT&T dealer to check on the coverage area for my phone, and went to the small impromptu family reunion where everyone ate, drank, and was merry. We said our farewells and take cares, and left the Phoenix area around 2 PM Sunday.

Our journey had begun. Tier one was LA to Phoenix, Tier II would be Phoenix to Vegas.

May 6, 2004

The road to Vegas....

The road to Las Vegas was very... interesting. As we were nearing the Hoover Dam in Nevada, we had to stop for a security check. The presiding officer requested we open up and unload the car top carrier, and completely and unload the van.

Let me explain this car top carrier. It's big enough to hold a full-sized bathtub; and because I lost the key, its wired shut with some convenient holes drilled with a Dremmel™ and duct-taped closed. When the officer requested we empty it, I was STUNNED! I made like a monkey and climbed up to the top of the van in under three seconds, (not bad for only having three hours sleep in the last forty hours...) I got ready to open it, but asked the officer and my gentleman, "Before I go and open this thing, I need to know if we have any more DUCT tape!" The officer looked rather confused at my query, and my boyfriend explained that we were relocating from LA, and meeting our traveling party in Vegas. He managed to finagle the officer into letting us pass if we jimmied open the sides enough for him to look into the carrier using a flashlight. To my complete astonishment, the officer agreed.

The officer looked in, saw the bags of clothes I owned, and then went over to the other side where he saw a large black piece of electronics. When he asked what it was, I immediately offered the information. "Its a Karaoke Vocopro Wanderer™ - three speakers ninety watts each." He just shook his head. I know he was thinking something along the lines of, "Man, the freaks that come through here after dark!!!" ----and he would be right on that thought.

Well, we finally got into the Vegas area at about 11 PM, (after about an hour waylay at the Hoover Dam) - and headed off to peruse my boyfriend's Vegas destination dream, "The Borg Adventure."

When we got to the Star Trek Hilton, the event had already closed for the evening- only thirty seconds before we got there. I felt really bad. I knew that he really, really wanted to see the Borg adventure, and I knew that the caravan we were traveling with would be leaving for South Dakota before the exhibit opened again in the morning. I kept thinking, "if I hadn't taken that potty break, if I had not smoked that cigarette, if I had... if we had... if only." I felt horrible. I felt like it was "all my fault" that he missed out on something he really wanted to do.

After much reassurance from him, that it was all right, that it just wasn't meant to be right now, (he's so sweet!) and my promise to him to get back there soon so he could see it, we moved on. I made reservations for a room at the Excalibur. This was beginning to look like a night that just wasn't working out as planned, so I called ahead and made sure I had a confirmation number. When I got there, I had to wait an hour in line, and when we were finally up to the registrar, I discovered that my reservations were messed up. I told them I would be there in fifteen minutes, but they made my reservations for another day.... I started straightening out the situation, while my boyfriend was bothering the same clerk I was talking to by asking lots of very annoying, very distracting questions. "Is there a pool, is there a fitness center, what are the hours of the melee shows?" I had no idea why he needed to know all of these things while I was trying to register, but he kept persisting. I was almost ready to push the mute button any way I could!!! My stream of thoughts were suddenly interrupted when there was a tap, tap, tap on my shoulder. Frustrated, I turned around only to hear my boyfriend say, "Honey! We have a room with a Jacuzzi!"

Huh? I was absolutely boggled! What did I miss, I wonder? Suddenly, our room turned into a deluxe suite? We paid \$65 and had an \$850 room? How did he do this? I'm going to have to find out... eventually. But as for tonight, I felt completely taken care of, pampered, spoiled and decadent. I felt that for the first time in my life, someone was taking care of *ME* for a change! I guess I can deal with that.... I'll chalk it up to a learning experience. I'll remember this the next time I feel "flustrated" and feel like I need to find his mute button. He did GOOD! DAMN GOOD!

So there I was, spoiled like a pampered princess, standing in a deluxe suite in the Excalibur! This was a "once in a lifetime" for me. We ordered room service, a Miller Light™ and nachos, and slid into the Jacuzzi; in the most amazing room I've ever seen in my life, with the most amazing view I've ever seen in my life... all because of his finagling. He said my persistence about the reservation screw-up helped as well, although I have *NO* idea what he was talking about.

Not bad for our first night in Vegas. What an amazing start to our journey! What an incredible team we are.

Here's to many more adventures.

May 7, 2004

From Vegas to Rapid City

So, I woke up in the most amazing deluxe suite at the Excalibur in beautiful, downtown Las Vegas. I went for a shower, and by the time I had dried, dressed and exited, my boyfriend's parental units (aka: the caravan we would be traveling with) were already in the room waiting to take off. After a quick pack-up, "idiot check," and leaving a tip for the hotel housekeeper, we got into our cars and started the long journey to Rapid (rabid) City, SD. We drove through Nevada, and the northern tip of Arizona. Wait a minute! We just came from Arizona! I was about to get on the horn and tell them all we were going the wrong way; but before I could wrestle the walkie-talkies out of their holders, we were in Utah.

My boyfriend's parents insisted on paying for gas and hotel for practically the whole trip. It was a two day journey before we finally got to our hotel rooms in Rapid City, SD. I tried to pay for anything I could, but usually they jumped in before I could get to it, and refused to let me pay for things. I just didn't know how to deal with this. I'm not used to being taken care of, I guess I like it, but like any "manly-man working girl" who's had no choice but to take care of themselves and others, I can't help but feel slightly out of place. Slightly... erm... castrated. Yet, on the other hand, I feel blessed. For the first time in, I guess... EVER, I'm the one being taken care of. Gee, its awfully nice to be able to not worry about the details every once in a while.

Let me tell you, there's not much to say about country driving through Nevada and Utah, (or Wyoming and South Dakota for that matter.) It all looks the same to me. It all looks like dead, rotting, hot, terrible desert. I HATE the desert. To me, the desert looks like God has turned upon it with blind eyes, completely abandoned it, shunned it, and left it for dead. In theory I know there is an abundance of life and beauty in the desert, but somehow I just don't see it. Instead, I see brown, charred landscape, I see baked and burned ground just pining for a single drop of life giving water. I see extreme need; desolate thirst and abandon. The occasional cactus flower and small creature reminds one that life can exist in the most desolate area, but at what cost? How much more does life have to struggle to survive here? And who would willingly choose to live in such desolate surroundings? I guess I am not a child who appreciates the desert. I wish I could see it for its true beauty, but all I see is an overburdened, overtaxed waylay of the soul.

To my complete astonishment, as we were driving through Utah, I see a car towing a boat. A minute later, I see another car towing another boat. Then I see another! I'm beginning to become extremely curious. "Where on earth could all these people be going in this terrible, desolate *desert* where they would need to tow boats?" My brilliantly intelligent boyfriend replies, "Honey, lets go over the name 'Salt LAKE City' again, shall we?" Boy, now don't I feel stupid. Oh yeah, huh. They must be going to that giant lake "thingy" in the middle of the desert. I don't think we went anywhere near the lake, I could be completely wrong, but I thought that if there were water that anywhere near where I was driving, I imagine I would have seen the greener more lush signs of said oasis. Some part of me wished to stop and explore further, to probe the deadly terrain for signs of survival, but we were on a timetable; and quite frankly, I really haven't the least desire to cross through those dead lands ever again.

Wyoming and the Western part of South Dakota looked pretty much the same to me. To my eyes they seemed to be just a void of death valleys, ever encroaching and stretching onward into oblivion. What was not desert was "high plains," but it still looked just as dead and teaming with arid overexposure to my childish, neophyte, untrained eyes.

The most interesting part of Wyoming was a quaint little town called CASPER. Yes, presumably named after "the friendly ghost," it looked like a cozy, quiet little town in the middle of nowhere. It had all of the signs of a cute little backwards ghost-town with absolutely NOTHING going on; about two stoplights and a dairy queen, that's about all there was. But it was a cute little town nonetheless.

I saw cows, bulls, brown grass, lots of brown grass... fields and fields of brown grass, clouds, and a bit of hilly mountains... (oh yeah, them-there "Rockies;") well, that was fun I guess, but I had to say more than twenty times: "There's a whole lot of nothing going on out here."

So, for the whole trip, the two car caravan (the parental units in one car and the kids following right behind) passed the time by entertaining ourselves playing "Chatty Cathy" games on a set of walkie-talkies with a five mile radius. In this arid landscape, with hills too steep for a decent AM/FM signal, that's about the best entertainment value you will EVER get for your gas money's worth.

So we got creative. We even infiltrated the "I spy" game from the movie **Brother Bear**. Every time we saw the occasional single lone tree that was struggling to survive in that desolate land, we had to point it out.

"I spy a kind of vertical log thingy."

"Tree!"

"Oh, you're good."

At the next sighting of a sole deciduous survivor, my boyfriend's father got on the horn and said, "I wanted to point out the South Dakota national forest over there..." I started laughing so hard, I almost swerved the van packed up with all our worldly possessions into a semi-truck.

My second favorite game that's played over the CB talkies is the blatant "can't see 'em!" game that's starts with anything painted in camouflage.

"We're passing a fleet of army trucks over there..."

"What trucks? We don't see any... oh, they must be camouflaged!"

Yes, sadly, this is prime entertainment when traveling through Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, and the western parts of South Dakota. Now I know why cow tipping is said to be so popular out here...

Oh! The experiences one has – **when wandering into strange restaurants in foreign towns:**



Loki in Captain Keno's

Wandering a road to nowhere
two travelers sojourn around
as hunger ensues they stop for a rest
at a restaurant in the wake
of a small town.

They step inside, the world stands still
Nostalgia everywhere surrounds
The ingénue boy places their order
his familiar manner dumbfounds

The food is served - a simple meal
Yet pleases even palates well-bred
The travelers could surely
fare no better
for less than a pack of reds.

A stranger approaches,
handsome & free
and a smile that charms
reason from rhyme
he sits down next to the gent and says
"Its Ziggy Marley time"

The traveler pretends not to listen,
Doesn't give the stranger his due
an easier target is elsewhere
so the stranger quietly withdrew

A happy couple sits two seats behind
the stranger thirsts for them
after only a minute of focus
a drink is hurled at the man

The woman gets up
and storms outside
the man pursues in passion
bottles and bricks are thrown about
screams pierce the air
and glass is broken.

The stranger while his work not done
looks for more people to charm
finds his way to the back of the bar
and out of the traveler's' harm

The travelers having finished their meal
stroll outside to leave
spot a stranded soul fixing a tire
and shudder at the air they perceive

a local steps into the night
to taunt the stranded lemming
"He's trying to be a man" says he
another storm is surely brewing

Next to the instigator stands the
handsome man
with a smile that's calm and esquire
happy to see the heated sparks fly
content to cause another fire

The travelers walk away from them
while Loki stands about
what happens next remains untold
but evil is no doubt

Loki was in Captain Keno's today
spreading doubt and fears
the world outside oblivious while
Chaos invisible appears

- Rebekah Faith

May 9, 2004

Rapid City, and the road to PA

My boyfriend and I arrived in Rapid City, South Dakota; the town of his younger years. We stayed in a Super Eight motel that had a full-service bar, casino, pool, fitness club... it was really a nice little place. We arrived at our "landing point" at about 11pm, and went right to the room to crash. It was one of the better rooms I have seen in a motel chain in several years. There was a fridge, microwave, tub and shower, a safe, two beds and a little table.

The next morning, my boyfriend's father met us to take our van over to a local mechanic to get looked over. The only thing it really needed was shocks. It was way overloaded and scraping the road whilst we were driving. We played "tag-a-long" with the parental units around town, and did the tourism thing to Mount Rushmore where I got to view some scenery that I absolutely fell in love with. White rocks and pine trees, mountains, scenery out of my wildest fantastic childhood dreams. It reminded me of my dearest childhood book, *Heidi*. I wanted to roam, to climb, to spelunk the dirt off of those mountains, but we were on a schedule. All I had time to do was look over a single view, and ponder the beauty in my heart until I have a chance to return.

Then we went out to town. My boyfriend's parents went about their business whilst my boyfriend introduced me to a wonderful Indian wares shop, and showed me around some sights of downtown. It seemed every corner had a statue of a president on it. "What the heck is with this president motif?" I thought, "You've got presidents on every corner, and stoned presidents chiseled into rocks in the middle of a mountain? Silly motifs."

Then they took us out for my very first buffalo burger. I'm traditionally a rare burger person, but I never had buffalo before, so I asked for medium. It was rather dry, and much less fatty than ordinary cow. So, I'll remember next time to order rare buffalo... bloody buffalo, still charging buffalo. I like my food to MOVE! But it was good, nonetheless.

We went to see his childhood home, and a really cool Nordic temple, and some dinosaurs. I ran off to climb the concrete dinosaur replicas whilst his father took some really embarrassing pictures of me... apparently humping a stegosaurus.

On the way back, my boyfriend's father showed off his special skill, his horse call. We found a herd of horses and pulled over on the road; his dad did "the whinny" and all of the horses came stampeding over to the side of the road to the very edge of their gated enclosure to say "Hi." When I said all of the horses, I really meant ALL of the horses. Not a one stayed behind. We got to pet and feed ALL of the horses. There were like twenty of them! I told my boyfriend he has GOT to learn how to do that.

After our adventures were over for the day, we picked up the van, and my boyfriend's father paid for it. (I was completely overwhelmed. I really can't get used to this feeling of other people taking care of me.) We went to his mother's birthday party, and I was appalled that he didn't even warn me that his mother's birthday was approaching. He said he didn't remember. I thought that was one of the prescreening questions I asked all my potential boyfriends? I can't believe that I could have missed that one! "What's your mother's birthday?" I ALWAYS ask! The way I figure it, if a guy has enough respect to remember his mother's birthday, then he'll treat his women OK. Guess my stereo types aren't full-proof, because he treats me just fine and he didn't know when his mother's birthday was!

The next day, my boyfriend took me to a place called Reptile Gardens. Reptile Gardens was nice; I love all animals, even the scaly varieties. We watched a show where a bunny rabbit operated a pull gun aimed at his trainer (that was interesting) and I got to play tic-tac-toe with an exceptionally brilliant chicken. I mean, this chicken must have had an IQ in excess of 166. It made the first move, OK, I could allow that, I mean after all, it IS a chicken. I can accept "chicken handicap." Well, next time I'll know better. Damned smart chicken!

We went out for dinner, and I thought he might want to take me to party "South Dakota Style." I was expecting cow tipping and the like. No deal. Apparently, I'm told it's not the smartest thing in the world to go cow tipping during calving season. Oh well. So we sat at a restaurant, I devoured my very first Indian taco, a couple of beers, and went off to the ladies room. When I came back, his PARENTS had arrived. "Look honey, I conjured parents!" he said.

Why the HELL did he do that! Conjuring up parents whilst I was in party mode. That's embarrassing, you know? Turns out he didn't conjure them, they just magically showed up. How DID they know where to find us? (OK, REALLY SCARY!) Anyway, after dinner, we were dog tired. The trip and the sight seeing were bound to inspire a coma of the dead. It was only 10:00 at night, quite a remarkably early night for us, so I said, "I bet we'll be in Philadelphia within forty-eight hours." He didn't believe me.

From 10 PM that night, including a whole night of rest before we started out Friday at 10 AM; we arrived in Philadelphia, Saturday at 9:58 PM. We had reached our final destination in forty-seven hours and fifty-five minutes. I drove almost the whole way straight through. There's no denying it. I have got the iron butt of roadworthy-ness.

We arrived in Philadelphia with \$200 in our pockets, a van full of our only worldly possessions, eager to crash on my friend Sarah's couch and promptly start hunting for jobs and a place to live the very next morning. Sarah will allow us to stay at her place for a little while and eat her food, until we can get our ducks in order. It won't be easy, but I'm sure I'll find something within two weeks. We'll be just fine. I know it.

Chapter 3:
Shattered Hopes and Dreams.

May 25, 2004

There is no more bottom

I haven't written anything in a while. I've been doing nothing but job hunting. No time for "frilly writing" or singing or anything like that. Things are going to get very, very bad, very soon. I've been in Pennsylvania for almost three weeks now. I'm still homeless and jobless. There is no more bottom to this maelstrom. I found a little part time job that I can start on Tuesday that will pay for gas and food, but I only have five dollars until I get my first check, and five dollars will just about cover the first two days of gas to get to my part time thing and back. I'm still trying to apply for programming jobs, but my cell phone is currently cut off until I can pay the corporate sharks forty-four dollars to continue my job hunt. I don't want to say it couldn't be worse, of course it could. I could say I still have my health and my sanity, but I'm sick and doubled over in pain right now, depressed and suicidal.

Sarah has been a godsend. Kevin and I have been staying on her couch, and she has insisted that we eat her food, so really, I am blessed. I have a roof over my head, a shower, and food, and really nothing else to want for, right? (Except for maybe some feminine products, and smokes, and gas, and a way to get around.) So why am I so depressed and suicidal? Why do I want to live like an animal wandering in the woods, wearing only a loincloth, grunting instead of speaking, digging for bugs to eat until human services finds me and picks me up? Why do I dream of walking along the edge of the interstate with no shoes, dodging rocks and wayward treads tossed up by passing semi-trucks; heading for the blissful ocean boardwalk of Atlantic City, panhandling for my food, or eating out of trash cans I find along the way?

I don't want to be a bother on Sarah anymore. I don't want to call my brother(s) and father and ask for money. (I already called my father, he flat out rejected me.) Does my father even know I'm homeless? I'd like to drive over to his house and sit on his porch for forty nights and forty days until he acknowledges my presence. God! I wish I could do that, but I really don't have the gas to get there. The five dollars I have will get me to work and back for the first two days. Other than that, I have no clue what to do.

I know that this is all a product of my own doing. The decisions I made. I would have a job back in California right now if I didn't screw it all up; but I wouldn't be any happier with that darn job I hated anyway, would I? I believe my contract ended for a reason. I believe I was led to Pennsylvania for a reason. I believe things will eventually get better. But I don't want to live like this anymore. If it weren't for the knowledge that I just have to hold on for the next five to ten days until my first check comes in, I don't know where I would be right now.

I have to hold on for five to ten days. Maybe something will come through sooner, or God will see fit do the "seven days of oil" trick with my gas tank.

May 31, 2004

Climbing out of the maelstrom

I was able to sell my guitar for fifty dollars which will provide me enough gas and food money until I get my first paycheck. My brother is going to take care of this month's car payment for me. I'll just have to wire the money to the dealership when I get it from him, and all will be OK. I'll get my brother's money back to him with my first real check.

Two of us living on the couch at Sarah's house is a bit stifling. She's in the middle of a move, and planning a wedding, so things are hectic, frantic and tempers are short. I really want to be out of her hair. I don't want to be bothering her at a time like this, but I really have no other place to go. Maybe I can check with another friend to see if Kevin and I can live there for a week or two. That might give us some much needed space.

I start my part time temporary job tomorrow. The only thing I truly need is a phone to check in on my applications and see about the real jobs.

Restarting a life is complicated.

June 5, 2004

Moving...

Kevin and I moved off of Sarah's couch and out of her house. Tempers were starting to get a little hot, and I was sick and tired of hearing her personal opinions on Kevin (and everyone else.) I know she thinks she's helping, but some of the things she says are really hurtful to hear. Sarah's not exactly subtle, and she hates everyone and everything. She is the perfect "equal opportunity hater" if you want to put it that way. Anyway, I couldn't take it anymore. I wanted to do what I could to save my friendship and my relationship.

So, we loaded up the van with all of our possessions again, placed some of the less immediately needed items in a storage locker, and we moved out, on good terms of course. I just wanted to do what was best for everyone. We moved in with another friend; into Amy's basement. The basement will be available until August 1st, when her classes start, but by that time, I'm sure we'll be settled and be able to get our own place. Thank God for friends! Anyway, this place is really cute! It's a really nice basement where Kevin and I can stretch out a bit. There's even a stove, a refrigerator, a bathroom, a shower, and a microwave - all downstairs, and all private. There's even a yard where I can look at birds, squirrels, trees and even deer! We should be so lucky to find a place this nice when we have the money to rent.

June 15, 2004

Still working.

I had an interview today for a REAL programming job. For REAL money. A job that can put me back on my road to my REAL life. Wish me luck. ***Please***, wish me luck.

I've been working these little piddly secretarial, filing, "whatever I can do" day-jobs just to put food on the table. I take a temporary day job, but I know I am worth more. Hey, that's what happens when one is desperate, needing to pay bills, and needing to put a life back together. For some reason, my friends admire me for this... doing what needs to be done to eat and live. I don't see where I have any choice in the matter. I happen to enjoy having food to eat. I happen to enjoy having gas in the car. I need to keep the phone on, so that I can job-hunt. I need to make the storage payments so that all of my wordly possessions aren't liquidated.

Yes, I'm working day jobs, but somehow I turned one particular job into even more. I finagled a way to have a "mentor" within. I work three days a week billable to the agency, and two days a week for "mentor" time. I know its slightly not cool to take money from the temp agency in this way, but this shrewd accountant-type business owner had me against a corner. He said he didn't want to pay the extra agency fees; he said he wanted tell my agency that I wasn't working out (which would be an incredible detriment to my temporary worker reputation.) He said he would pay ten dollars an hour directly to me under the nose of the agency. So, what could I do? Well, I'm not stupid. I worked out the above deal. I can't take money from my agency, but I can trade intellect. Intellect, in my book, is still an untaxed commodity.

So I am getting pointers, help and information, on starting my business and putting my life back in order for the eight hours a week I work for "mentor time" and the agency is getting sixteen dollars an hour for the twelve hours I work for them. Without major scruples, I think its all going to work out. For the money, the time, and the trade of information, I think I've worked out a sweet deal.

But in the game of scruples, is my deal with the powers of good, or the powers of evil? The blending is so menageried, one can never tell until the end.

I wrote this while looking out over the yard at the fireflies twinkling amidst the night rain.

FIREFLIES....

Fireflies dance in the summer wind
a lightening bolt warns them of impending end
their infuriated dance continues
as they light up the landscape
in fierce competition with the sky

The god of thunder and lightning protests
at the small shows down below
and sends his faithful soldiers
into battle regime

the troops are rallied,
they fight against the ones
fighting to preserve their very lineage
as they reign down against
the tiny creatures
struggling to light the night

and so it seems
that there is competition in the show,
the small fireflies light only a piece of the z axis
while the lightening competes for lonely x and y

and thus the troops reign down,
and beat the small - into the ground
and the sparkles die down
as the god who knows all
takes - over the world.

-Rebekah Faith

Persistence.... pleasure.... and will to live and achieve - is what drives me.

June 16, 2004

Do I have the flu?

I've been sick all day. On those extremely rare (like less than five times in my life) occasions when I throw up - I KNOW I'm sick.

I think its just nerves over my current situation, just doing temp work to make ends meet, not having a decent paying job, living in my Amy's basement, not having a real home, trying to write some programs, hoping they will generate extra income to make ends meet, worrying about the car - and the storage payment for the locker that's currently storing all of my worldly possessions.....but Kevin swears I have the flu. Now he thinks he has it too..... he's asleep, and I'm still cleaning from dinner.

The job interview yesterday went well, but when I called to find out if I had the job, I was told they want to hold a couple more interviews. I should know next week. In my opinion, I don't think they'll find anyone else who would be a better match for the work - so I can only assume that perhaps they might think that I didn't fit in with the people. Ah well, speculation has exactly the same value as THINKING about starting a business. Absolutely none. Thinking is pointless. Doing is divine. Shit, that reminds me. I need to do laundry.

So, in my spare time, I wrote a program that will automatically fill a computer database with fresh up to the minute business information. I can type in any zip-code in the country - and have all of the business names, addresses & phone numbers in that zip import directly into my contact database with preset follow-up dates. I'm planning on using it as a marketing tool for my web design business, but it occurred to me that other small businesses might have use for my little tool as well. Imagine. Fresh, up to date current leads - names, addresses and phone numbers with the click of a button. I think I'll call it PSD LEADS.

I want to start a business. I need to figure out how to sell my programs. I need clients. My plate overflows, yet my cup is empty. Bummer.

June 19, 2004

Unowned...

I wrote this when thinking about how temporary and frail my life truly is.

Unowned, thus untitled

The ebb and tide flows
the circle continues
our life at the mercy
of what energies surround

what once was ours
was never ours
and too soon we are reminded
as it quickly fades away.

we hold onto visions
while dreams unknown
whisper hints of happiness
from beyond another world.

what once was ours
was never ours
and too soon we are reminded
as it quickly slips away

promises imagined
for a piece of mind
just a velveteen rabbit
in a storybook world

the concrete and stones
are but wisps and ash
temporary commodities
and nothing more

what once was ours
was never ours
and too soon we are reminded
as it quickly wastes away.

-Rebekah Faith

June 25, 2004

Dreams from long ago....

Ever since I could remember, I've always wanted to be a singer. At the age of four, I used to drive my parents crazy by jumping on the bed and singing until they would kick me outside. I started making up my own songs at the age of six, but more to the point, everywhere I would go, I would sing. Despite moving over thirty-two times before graduation, I was never bored or lonely, I would simply sing.

At the age of seventeen, I had a long talk with a friend of my father's (an agent) who told me about all the seedy sides of the business. How you are trapped on a tour bus, starving, usually there are slimy sleazy people wanting to trade their marketing prowess for a young girl's "services" in the good old casting couch tradition.... He even tried to scare me off by regaling me with his very own personal experience of when he was on a road tour with Janis Joplin. The agent friend said Janis, after the end of a concert, returned to her room holding a bag full of liquor. She drank the whole thing, got slobbering drunk, and screwed every guy in the place. Course this is just hear-say, and looking back now, I doubt its true - but its still quite a thing for a seventeen year old girl to try and process. This one little conversation had the potential of dashing a young girls dreams forever.

Despite the trauma this caused on my little brain, at the age of seventeen, I was still undeterred. Singing burned in my soul. I continued practicing every note of Mariah Carey's technical masturbations, and got so good that people would stare in stark disbelief. I even ended up winning a couple of talent contests for my voice. Afterwards, the judges would approach me and ask me why I wasn't singing professionally. I said, "I'd love to. Tell me how!" To which they just stammered - scratched the backs of their minds and when they came up empty, turned around in shame and walked off.

I had no friends and nothing better to do than to stand in my room all day and all night and practice singing. I would start singing... and not realizing that six hours had passed, I was still singing. My uncanny finely tuned voice was nothing more than a byproduct of sheer loneliness. At the age of twenty-one, the technical level of Mariah bored me. I started working on opera. By the age of twenty-five, I could hold my own on an aria and when I'd sing in public, I'd always have at least five people tell me that it wasn't really me singing. I had to close my mouth and let the background continue alone, and then start singing different words for them to believe that my voice was not a professional recording.

I always wanted to be a singer. Not so much anymore. Now I'm a smoker, and a computer programmer. My voice is out of practice and a bit damaged by tar and nicotine, and my only real goal in life is to tour de country and visit other countries.

I don't care how. If I could do it as a programmer, that would be cool. If I could do it as a singer... well....

I have another friend, Kimmy, that I've known for the last five years or so. I worked with her at one of the temporary jobs I did so long ago. I was a programmer, and she was an accountant. We got to talking, we became friends, and she said one day that she'd like to go karaoke with me, but she doesn't really sing. I told her it really doesn't matter, if she'd like to get up in front of people, and do whatever into the mic, that's the whole spirit of the fun! So, she came along, and I was generally surprised that she was on key. You don't find too many first-timers in a karaoke bar that can sing on key.

So I said to her that she was really good. She said that her father tells her that she is tone deaf. I told her, nonsense! She can sing. She just has to do it more. So we went out for karaoke a couple of times, but I was auditioning for bands and attending practices, so I couldn't accompany her that often.

I moved away to California, I came back, and I haven't sung with a band in over four years. My dreams of being a singer are basically locked away in some cedar chest in the attick of my mind, covered in cobwebs. Then I get this letter from my dear friend Kimmy. (Permission granted for reprint.)

She writes, "God, I'm sooooo beat. I had my gig last night.....it was a bit crazy. The guys were late because of traffic, so we really didn't get to warm up much before we had to go on. Then there was supposed to be a cocktail hour before dinner, and we started playing the cocktail music, but then they started dinner early, so we were going to switch over to the dinner music (slower music), but they asked us to start doing the tribute to the fifties artists (we'd planned that for after dinner), so we had to switch around again to do that. Then there was some meeting going on next door to where we were (the Sheraton in Society Hill), and this guy from that company kept coming over and asking us to turn our music down, but then we couldn't hear ourselves! A couple of times I wasn't even sure if my mic was on! Chloe (the other singer) kept having to stand back by Matt (the keyboard player) to be able to hear the music. Then it was driving us crazy because they had all this food out and we could all smell it but couldn't have any....we didn't even get to have a glass of water or a cup of coffee....at least when you play a bar, people buy you drinks!!! lol About halfway through playing, the stage started coming apart, and there was a big gap in the floor that I kept having to be careful and watch out for or I'd have fallen in it! lol Then every time people were dancing, my mic stand would shake, and it hit me a couple of times, so I kept having to hold onto it. We finally finished around 9:30.....my feet were killing me (I had to wear heels and an evening dress), I was starving (I'd eaten light before the show, because I didn't want to take the chance of getting indigestion and burping during a song LOL), and just completely exhausted. Luckily, everybody kept coming up to us and telling us how good we were and how much they enjoyed the music, so that helped. I drove all the way home, stopped at Wendy's for a cheeseburger, came home, and just passed out! I still feel dead tired this morning. I'm supposed to go out tonight to see my friend's band, but I don't know. I'll have to see what I feel like tonight. "

So, I get to thinking, "Who wants to be a singer and deal with all that crap?"

Who am I fooling?

When I showed my rant to one of my dear friends, I got the following email reply: (permission granted for reprint.)

You are fooling yourself (*Anonymous*)

Wanting to be a singer defines a part of who you are. If you change that, you change a part of you. It is a dream and goal you have. It is what helps you get up in the morning and strive to better yourself each and everyday.

If you want to be a singer, NEVER stop trying. Never stop believing in yourself and what you want to be. But, rather, work towards it a little bit every day. If going out and singing at a Karaoke bar once a weeks helps, then DO IT. If practicing singing at home to be better helps, than DO IT.

NEVER give up on your dreams and goals! Sure you may need to put them aside, but always have them on the back burner of your mind. You never know when the one little thing might tip the scales and help you on your way.

July 2, 2004

Animal messengers...

I am now a firm believer in animal messengers.

On Tuesday, I saw a RED, I mean, RED cardinal in the morning, and a bat in the evening. I got two Resume rewrite jobs for twenty-five dollars a piece. - Ironically, I got one job in the morning, and the other in the evening.

Wednesday, I saw an eagle... soaring and circling the house....

I got a single project programming job for forty-seven dollars (five hours worth of work - and three weeks before I see the money, but hey, its something...) AND its now completed.

Then, Later on Wednesday, I saw a groundhog.... and I got a PSD Leads request - which may be \$50, or \$100 or even \$300, or maybe nothing.... it all depends on if I can get all the information together tonight, and sell it to the client. Groundhogs appear and disappear - no surprise there....

Today, I saw a baby fawn.... She was not fifty feet from me.... I got a software tester job for \$100 which will require I get my burned-out laptop fixed, (it overheated and won't start) but the job will take me two weeks to complete. - But there might be a bonus involved....

I have been working very hard to try and maintain temporary work (I'm working at office team at eight to ten dollars an hour for about one to two days a week) while looking for real programming jobs (which should be twenty-five to fifty dollars an hour.) I've had only interviews so far, but I've also been trying to start my side businesses, PSDLeads.com, Codev Multimedia, Rebekah's Resume Service, and about ten others.

Yes, the work of being self-employed. What choice do you have when you cannot find any other work? Trying to generate business includes daily posting of ads to over one hundred web sites, checking coding work sites for new listings, making twenty-five coder bids a day on new jobs posted, AND YESTERDAY I FINALLY GOT A BID AND COMPLETED MY FIRST JOB... it took me all of five hours, and I got paid forty-seven dollars for it. But hey, something is better than nothing, right?

My mother thinks that I have some inside information, and she wants me to web market her newest latest and greatest pyramid multilevel marketing scheme. What's my secret? I have no secret; except that I work over twenty hours a day just trying to make anything I can find happen.

Ladies and gentlemen. If you want to work forty hours a week, and collect a paycheck, and have paid sick time, and holidays... KEEP WORKING FOR SOMEONE ELSE. That is the FAIR, fair, faire, fare, FEAR, trade!!!!

If you want to work twenty hours a day, get paid almost nothing, live a life that is sleep deprived, and be barely able to keep gas in your car and a roof over your head, then go into business for yourself. You have your freedom, and you are participating in the FAIR, fair, faire, fare, FEAR, trade!!!!

On one hand, I think I'm shooting myself in the foot by doing these incredibly cheap coder bidding jobs. If I do these little jobs for the equivalent of \$2 - \$10 an hour coding, I'm helping the market decline. These people have work to be done, and instead of paying a recruiting company seventy-five dollars an hour to have someone come in from an IT recruiting agency, they post it up on this website, and coders compete down to almost two dollars an hour bidding for it.

This is the world we live in. I'm helping it turn (for better or worse.) On the other hand, I need to eat.... Hmm, an interesting moral dilemma there.

But, I digress, I am a woman on a mission. I will do ANYTHING to stay afloat. (Well that's what I'm trying to do, anyway.) In reality, I'm just struggling to keep her head above water, to have enough money for food and gas, and hopefully have enough money to pay her brother back within a week, and get a place to live, cause I will be homeless (no really, no more friends to stay with - I really mean living in a VAN kind of homeless) in under three weeks.

In brighter news, Kevin had a job interview yesterday. We will find out tomorrow if he gets the job. I am praying that he does, I'm really praying that he does. Not just for the current situation, but also, I know this particular job is right up his alley, and would make him happy, feel accomplished every day, AND he'd have a lot of FUN doing it. (I'm almost jealous.)

Furthermore, what's so incredibly funny, is if he gets the job, this will be the FIRST time in my ENTIRE life, that I'm dating someone that makes more than me!!!! Well, its not terribly good pay, but there *IS* overtime, and if he gets it, between my unemployment, my temp jobs, the substandard web software development contracts I'm doing, and the resumes I've been getting (I've had two clients so far at twenty-five dollars a piece) we should be able to squeak by.

The pressures, the stress, the desire for a bottomless bottle of merlot. Ah, if only.... to live in more blessed times again.

Thank god Kevin and I got some yard work to do today. I ache all over, and can barely move. My hands hurt to type, but the money we got will feed us until I get my sixty-five dollar check on Tuesday.

Anyway, like I said: Between the cardinal, and the bat, and the groundhog, and the eagle, and the fawn, I'm beginning to believe in animal messengers.

I just pray to GOD I walk outside and see a brachiosaur tomorrow.

July 7, 2004

Wow! I guess it could always be worse...

I am still unemployed. Still looking for jobs.... Ordinarily on Tuesday, I go to my PO box, and I collect a check from OfficeTeam for the hours I work on temp assignments for them. Last week I called in available every day, but they only had one four hour job for me, for eight dollars an hour, calling banks to verify that sufficient funds were available to deposit collection agency checks.

Every other Tuesday, I receive a California unemployment check. Well, I've received two so far. One for one week, and one for two weeks. The total amount of income I've received in the last three months since I lost my job in California from both means so far is \$1200. Two people have been trying to rebuild their lives on about \$400 per month. Its been real bad.

Of course I was grateful, for my friends who put me up, grateful that I would be receiving California unemployment, grateful to my brother who lent me the money to pay my car payment last month, grateful for a phone line so that I could call around for jobs; I always knew it could be worse... but I never expected....

#1. When I went to my PO box to collect my twenty dollar OfficeTeam check - it wasn't there. I called, and they said they never received a timecard for last week - even though I have the fax receipt notice. I don't have a fax machine, hell, I don't even have a home! So I called the company I worked for - and they said they'd re-fax it for me. Hopefully, I can have that twenty dollars by Friday or Saturday. It will buy gas for interviews, but that's about it.

#2. My unemployment check was not in my PO box either. Instead I have a notice that a hearing to determine eligibility of benefits is scheduled for July 12. California unemployment needs to question me. They think I quit my job. I did not quit, but when I left, I was asked to write up a little e-mail stating what I would do after my contract ended. I see it was used against me. Damn politics. TKO.

Here I am, sitting in the basement of a Amy's house. I have two weeks left here before I am homeless, I have no gas to get anywhere, not even to a job interview, not even to a job, not even to the post office to pick up my \$20 check on Friday. I have no money, not even a dollar. What the hell do I do now?!?!?!?

I'm scared. I pray that some miracle will happen. I've been praying to God for the last three days. I've been entrusting him to take care of me. I'm scared because the situation is getting worse, not better. I'm getting more and more depressed and dysfunctional.

I'm terrified. I don't know what to do anymore.

July 13, 2004

Depression ensues.

I had two interviews today. One for a computer job - which I don't know if it went so well. I was promised feedback by this afternoon - but feedback never happened. So I don't think I got the computer job.

I need to be employed NOW. I need to have food, gas and a place to live. So in my desperation, I interviewed today for a collector's position at a collection agency. They said they would hire me, pending a drug screen and background check. If they don't care about my decimated credit since California, and the fact that I'm sure I owe money to a few of their clients, I start Monday. I am ever grateful to my friend John who got me the interview.

In retrospect, I will be doing something that I promised myself I'd NEVER do again.

Lesson #1. Times change - It is possible for one to go from 97K to 0 in one foul swoop.

Lesson #2. NEVER say never.

July 14, 2004

Current events...

I stayed up all night programming something that will bring me \$100 in three weeks. Its now complete, distributed, and what remains is a waiting game for the money. Will it come in time? Who knows.

I made my calls this morning. First I called to find out about the computer job interview from yesterday, and I was told, "The client decided to move in a different direction." Hmm.. well, that figures. So, I immediately got on the phones and started calling around the Office temp agencies to see if they have any secretarial or temp work for right now. Nothing so far.

Then I started calling around the computer job places, to see if they've received anything new that would match my skill-set. I was told about one old computer job that I found out about as soon as I moved into PA - that the client loves my resume... and now he doesn't even want an interview. He wants to hire me, and I would start in September.

September. A lot of things could change before September. I have to figure out what I'm going to do for the next six to seven weeks. Where I'm going to live, how I'm going to eat, how I'm going to pay my storage bill so that all of my worldly possessions don't get liquidated. How I'm going to keep my pager and cell phone on, so I can keep up the job hunt. How I'm going to keep gas in my car.

And did I mention, where I'm going to live? Yes, I know I did, but its such a big issue I thought I'd mention it twice. I have until August 1st to find a new place to live. I have no more friends to turn to, so within two weeks, I'm going to have to come up with enough money to stay in a hotel.

Within two weeks, I should have an answer one way or the other from California unemployment. It is possible I can get my benefits back, but I can't bank on that. Within two weeks, I could have gotten the collection agency job, and might be receiving my first check. But I won't know until all of the background checks are done.

A lot of things can happen in two weeks. A lot of things could happen by September. Let me just pray that "A lot of things" are good things. Encouragement Welcomed.

July 15, 2004

Yup, she is tenacious.

I found a day job for today, and made \$100. The money was quickly spent on gas, food, and a storage payment. I have \$10 left. I found a day job for tomorrow. It will pay sixty-five dollars, and I'll get the money on Tuesday. I am tenacious, and persistent; and I'll keep banging my head against the wall until something good happens.

I start the collection job on Monday. God help me. I honestly don't know if I can do collections again. The last time I did collections, I couldn't handle it. I just couldn't call people who were in bad situations and demand money. I spent every evening crying. I spiraled into a suicidal depression. Maybe they will call me and rescind the offer. Maybe they'll say my credit is too bad to be hired.

I'm working on a backup job for next week just in case. I'll find out tomorrow if I have a secretarial gig to fall back on instead. Please let me have that secretarial gig. I don't want to do collections again.

Wish me luck.

July 16, 2004

A little humor...

I thought a little humor would be in order right now....

Due to financial uncertainty, the light at the end of the tunnel will be turned off until further notice. - Author Unknown

Chapter 4:
The Light at the End of the Tunnel.

July 16, 2004

I think god had a plan

I called California unemployment office today to follow up on their suspension of my benefits. I wanted to see if they had received the information I sent them about my case. They had canceled my benefits pending review of my case. I called in.... and asked to speak to my caseworker, and they gentleman on the other end of the phone said, well, I don't think you'll need any additional information as your case is approved. We cut your check & mailed it today.

Good News! Yay!!!

I'll be receiving two weeks (and maybe four) of unemployment very shortly. So that means I'll definitely be getting about \$600 within the next four days. And maybe another check within twelve days. So this means, I WON'T be homeless in two weeks. And I may have enough capital to start renting an apartment or a private rental. I really think god planned it this way - so I have the bulk funds I need to find a place to live.

I start the collections job on Monday. I got notice that my drug screen and background check were fine. I called the temporary placement agencies and they do not have any longer term work, just a two day gig. Therefore, I decided I MUST take the steady collections job. So, I'll have steady income (at least ten dollars an hour) starting Monday. With the potential for commissions. If the commissions are good, and the market remains bad, who knows if I'll ever go back to the programming field? Who can say what life will bring?

I would tell you that the unethical day job I had to do today, really put the collections job in its place. If I didn't feel badly about the calls I was taking today, I shouldn't feel badly about collections. (I think its that god and his plan thing again.)

Maybe I'll live through this. Ciao!

July 17, 2004

I wrote this at work today.

I was inspired whilst I was working a very unethical job today. I don't want to go into detail except that one company went out of business, and left the finance company stiffed. The finance company is trying to collect the monies from the customers anyway, for a service that no longer exists. It was a bit disheartening to do what I had to do today. At least on Monday I start working with a reputable company, even though it IS collections.

The Workday

Shades of white and gray paint the inside of a stale, transient building.
The stark, crisp boundaries drawn hold life in frozen space.
Cold, dead air creeps from the ventilation and stifles creativity in its wake.

Time stops on the outside world; only the memories of the workers live on.
Each new string of life breaks free for an instance, dances around the water-cooler,
and struggles to survive in a stagnant world.

Warm memories frozen for the workday
paused until the final bell rings and the mass exodus ensues.
There the outside world resumes and the present plays again.

The stale, transient building is left behind as night falls.
Lights are dimmed as shades of white and gray fade to black;
then waits in idleness to steal the next day.

-Rebekah Faith

July 18, 2004

A day spa.

I only have five dollars to last until Tuesday. So how did I get all of the services and pampering of a day spa, on my current "pocket-lint" budget? The answer: a WONDERFUL boyfriend.

There have been many times in the last few months, that I have been stressed out beyond the point of cracking. And many times, that I just wished I had the money to take a one-day escape.

Kevin got a wild idea, that today is "pamper your girlfriend day" Today, I've had all of the treatments of a day spa and salon - he gave me a two hour full body massage, a bubble bath with oils, candles, incense, a glass of juice in a wineglass, music, even came in to wash my hair for me. Then he cooked breakfast, and has been spoiling me rotten all day. I think he said I might even have a manicure later.

It is the simple things that make life so wonderful. Aside from having a place to live, and food, and gas to get around... I've learned that money doesn't really mean that much at all.

I am truly blessed, and a very pampered five-dollar princess.

July 22, 2004

Tick....tick....tick...

Is that a clock, or a time bomb?

It could be either one... Eight days and counting until I am homeless.

Let me start by saying I really want to thank god. Somehow, I don't know how, I have been provided exactly what I need, exactly when I need it. I think there may be something to that **Rolling Stones** song: "You can't always get what you want... but you get what you need."

I now have the collections job. I only have to make it to Aug. 10th before I get my first paycheck. As you read along, dear readers, let's play, "Can you count how many miracles unfold in this entry?" My unemployment benefits went under review for a while, and I spent a month or so without unemployment, really scrambling and struggling with very little money. At least fifteen miracles happened to me in the last month just getting gas, food and getting by.

One of these little miracles happened in a grocery store. I was completely out of money and waiting in line at the checkout. I was standing in the line clinching my checkbook, praying to god that I would be able to get some much needed groceries; but at the same time I was also ready to run out carrying everything I needed in my arms if my check wasn't accepted. Yes, I was actually considering shoplifting the three most important items: milk, toilet paper and a plunger. By some miracle, my check was accepted. Very slowly, and very controlled I walked out of the store, and when I arrived at the front curb, I collapsed into a ball of tears. I sat down and wept for a good three minutes. While I was trying to compose myself before heading to my car, an old blonde lady and her daughter walked by. They asked if everything was alright. I replied. "Yes. I am so grateful. I was able to get the things I needed." The look they gave me said that they were somehow amazed and touched by my circumstance, but it was time to move on with their lives.

Tuesday evening I ran out of gas on the boulevard. That day I had only twenty-six cents to my name, I had no cigarettes, but I had a sixty dollar check in hand. Right after work, I made a "B-line" for the nearest check cashing place - but my fuel gage had different ideas. My car gave up the ghost right in the middle of the fast lane. Just a little farther (two blocks) and I would have made it to the check-cashing place right next to the gas station - only to find out that it was closed, and I would be stranded. Instead, because I had stalled in the middle of a dangerous eight lane divided highway, a wonderful gentleman stopped to help me and even gave me one-half of a tank of gas to get me home. I didn't think I'd need all that - and I tried to refuse, but he insisted. Enough gas was provided to me to last the two whole days it would take to find a place that would cash my check.

Somehow, I lived. Somehow, I made it through. Now, I will get four weeks of checks within the next two weeks... exactly enough to get me through until I have my first paycheck from the collections job- and to help with securing a place to live. I couldn't have planned it better myself! I really think there's a master plan at work here... perhaps I'm delusional, but what other explanation could there be for all of these "skin of the teeth" experiences?

This is why I'm not terribly worried when I tell you that I will be homeless in just under eight days. I have a feeling that something will happen, just in the nick of time.

Tick... tick.... tick....

Is that a clock, or a time bomb?

Who can tell?

Additional:

I am getting really tired. Don't know how much longer these feet of mine will hold up. I have oogles of fortitude - I'm about to take on ANOTHER part time job (in addition to my full-time job, and five internet projects.)

I tell you - I can barely make it through the day as it is. My energy is quickly failing me. But, I must keep on truckin'. I must do what needs to be done. Because if I don't do it, who will?

July 25, 2004

LIFE. Even scarier than movies.

To recap, I won't have a place to live on only five days. I was calling around for apartments and private rentals, but nothing has worked out yet. I don't have the big deposit necessary to circumvent my terrible credit situation.

So, I called some hotels and motels to compare rates. At one place, I got a weekly rate of about \$290. It includes a fridge, micro, limited cable and fifty cents each local call. Laundry facilities are on site. I'm a bit worried that if I'm making \$400 a week - with taxes - that equals \$320 a week. If I'm paying \$290 a week for the hotel, that will leave only \$30 each week for food, gas, laundry, smokes, Internet phone charges, storage payment, cell phone, pager, Internet site fees, saving up to get an apartment, or the much needed antidepressant elixir I'm so fond of (and haven't been able to afford lately.) Oh, but for a single beer. <*sigh*>

Anyway, I called my agency back about my promised September (well, they moved the start date to October) computer job. So far, so good. So far, its still a "go." So, If I'm not making any commissions at the collections job, I have an alternate plan for October to make the extra money I'll need to get out of the hotel. On the other burner, I also had a phone interview for another programming job that will start in August in New York City. I don't know anything yet, but its something brewing.

So I guess I have to bide my time, live very scrudgingly for the next six weeks or so, and then everything will be OK. I already have my first week of hotel saved, I will pay my first week of hotel on July 31. My next hotel payment will be due on August 6th. My last unemployment check should be in the mail by August 5th, so if the postal system works, I'll have the money to stay the second week. I supposedly get my first paycheck for my job on August 10, so that will cover the third and forth weeks.

Talk about skin of the teeth. If anything goes wrong, I'm screwed. I'm praying that nothing goes wrong. Please let my car work for six more weeks. Please let the checks come on time. Please, please, please, grant my life the gift of clockwork for the next two months.

I'm living a life that is even scarier than movies.

July 26, 2004

Interesting Times

It was an icky Monday. I had a whole weekend of utter burnout. I nearly collapsed under the stress and caved in. It was not pretty. My boyfriend did a lot to help keep me in check. I wrote these at work today, and then I felt much better.

Pile-Up

This heavy load is crushing me.
it longs to be ignored
perchance in sleep, 'twould go away
if only for a while.

This load keeps growing every day
Invading every step
I cannot breathe, I cannot speak
I need to get away.

The more it grows, the more I sink
until I fight no more.
Forever buried in my tomb
As long, forgotten lore.

-Rebekah Faith

Bleak Mirage

Moving forth, the trail behind - echoes haste in stead
The path is forged, the road before awaits till shadow's end
The work complete, will not unfold till seasons pass again
No sign of hope discourages the last remaining pen.

Quell the dark, blind to light, a bleak mirage instead
masking fears in brittle clay for strength to move ahead
painted face, a frozen smile, ensures a bitter gain
Aching feet and lonely heart; the light begins to reign.

-Rebekah Faith

Finally, I feel that the hotel situation - even though it will be expensive - is actually a step up and I will be happy there. Kevin and I will have our own space; I won't have to worry about stepping on my friends' toes or invading their space or worry about something happening that will jeopardize friendships. (Like something breaking - or an argument, or whatever.) It will feel much better to have a space that I am renting - even if it IS a hotel, and even if it IS expensive, and even if it IS temporary, and even if there IS a chance of getting stuck there.

I just have to remember to take my happy pills. When I do, my focus is much better, my outlook is much better, and I feel like I can trudge through anything. Believe it or not, my "happy pills" as I call them, are actually the pain killers I was prescribed for my herniated disks, but they seem to work a lot better than Xanax for controlling anxiety & depression. (I wonder why that is? Synthetic opiate, perhaps?) I must remember to be careful that when things even out - I don't become addicted. That would be bad. Real bad.

Well, peace, love, luck, happiness & all that. I have about six weeks of "interesting times" to swim through.... Hmm.. rather like the old Chinese curse: "May you live in interesting times." All right, I want to know right now, "Who cursed me?"

July 30, 2004

Last Mile Regrets...

"We all learn as we go. Recently what mistake did you make, and how did you learn from it?"

Lately, times have been rough. In tough times I do what needs to be done... no matter if it takes forty hours with no sleep, or four days of bouncing from contract to contract, making calls, driving with no gas, working with no food or money... whatever it takes. Lately, I've been burning out more and more frequently. Thank god for my wonderful boyfriend. He's been doing an awesome job of helping me keep up the ghost.

Now that a light is shining at the end of the tunnel, I realize that in my frantic scrambling to make things work - I ended up terribly overcommitted. I now realize that for the last three months, I have been continuously doing more than most humans are capable of; working insane schedules, brainstorming any kind of money plan, trying to start up five different Internet companies, gathering clients, working a full-time job, studying and testing on skills I need to improve, doing side contracts, writing resumes, designing websites, looking for work, going to interviews, yard work, house work, etc. Doing anything that has a chance of making a dollar to get me through.

The last mile is always the hardest. To complete what I've already committed to, during my frantic scrambling to get the "electricity started" on the light at the end of the tunnel; seems rather like a meager pointless exercise now that the light is already shining.

Was it a mistake to take on so much? I don't think so. In the grand chain of events, one thing leads to another, and then to another. So if I had not done exactly what I did, exactly when I did it, and exactly how I did it, I don't believe that there would be even the dimmest light shining at the end of the tunnel now.

My biggest mistake was not the over-commitments. My biggest mistake was not the burnout periods. My biggest mistake was not the fits, the tantrums, the anger, the screaming and the crying. My biggest mistake was my state of mind during these trials. My biggest mistake was during these times of overstressed burnout; that I was secretly thinking of myself as a failure, and thinking myself to be weak, pathetic, and unfit.

If I can just remember that I am doing my very best, and that I have done a remarkable job under the circumstances so far, and I am doing a stellar job building a life raft in these murky waters, this outlook alone will carry me through the last mile.

Only one mile to go....

Chapter 4:
New York – The City of Ambivalence.

July 31, 2004

Moving day (again)

Well, this is the day I move.

By the way? Did I mention I was offered the computer job in New York City? It was the job that I had a phone-interview for a few days ago.

I went up to NYC yesterday to sign the contract. That was an ADVENTURE. The computer job won't start until August 9th, and I've never heard of the company before, but it would be a considerable pay increase - if the paychecks clear.

I'm really worried. What if it doesn't work out. What if they change their mind? I mean I did sign a contract, but...

My boyfriend says its mine; I have it and I don't need to worry, but I've "HAD" lots of things in the last few months – only for them to bottom out at the last minute. Starting the 9th, (Next Monday) I will need to be in New York to start training for my new job for one to two weeks. So I'll stay one week in this hotel down here, and then use the money I get on Wednesday to pay for my first week of hotel in New York.

The New York City trip to sign the contract cost a little money to get up there and back, so I borrowed \$150 from my dad to complete the payment for the hotel where I'll be staying for a week. As of now, I have no gas and only \$1 left until Wednesday or Thursday. I figure if I do nothing but sleep, don't eat much, and don't smoke, hibernate in this hotel room, and only go out to get my check on Wednesday, I'll be perfectly fine.

This means I can't go to my collections job, I don't have the gas to get there, nor the food to keep me going for the week, but I can start the New York job that pays much more on the just ten days. If I just hang out underground until Wednesday, I'll be just fine.

Life is scary, but I think I'll survive. Hopefully things will be just fine...

August 1, 2004

From the hotel.

I'm all moved into the hotel. Its a very small room - about the size of nine tatami*.

Every time I check the Internet, it will cost me a fifty cent local call charge up at the front desk. So, your mission (if you choose to accept it) is to hop on, do everything at once for five internet projects, and hop off... Log in no more than twice a day. Joy and rapture.

Right now, I'm about to leave. I have to go back to Amy's house, the place I was staying for the last two months finish moving the last of the stuff, and clean everything.

Kevin **creatively volunteered** to stay at the hotel and guard all of our most important worldly possessions. I can see how that would be important; we are in an incredibly seedy area. This "roach-motel" we're staying at has the best hourly motel special in the city.

My friend Mark used to deliver pizzas to this place, and one time when he went to a room to deliver a pizza, a guy put a gun to his head - but gave him the money for the pizza anyway. Go figure; there's just no explaining some things in life.

So, I get no help in cleaning and moving out the last remaining traces of our stuff, but I guess he feels its better that he stays here & guards what is most important to our survival. He's an expert swordfighter, and has his weapons here in the hotel room, but I don't see how that would be any help against a speeding bullet. I have all the respect in the world for my beau, but don't see how my feelings for him could transform him into superman. Faster than a speeding bullet? hmmm....

My philosophy is - its better just to give over the stuff, and even not be there - than to risk your life...but I digress.

I'm off to clean the old place out. Perhaps I'll be back by 2am.

*tatami - a Japanese roll mat (floor covering) which is also used as a standard of measurement. When renting an apartment in Japan, you would ask "How many tatami is the unit?" To make the reference even more elusive, a tatami mat in Tokyo (1.76m by .88m) is smaller than a tatami mat in Kyoto (1.91m by .96m).

August 2, 2004

Tentatively celebrating.

Its Monday. This is the day I will quit my collections job.

I went up to New York on Friday for an interview for a REAL programming job. It was a small programming/outsourcing startup company on Broad street in Manhattan. Though they have three offices in India, two in Asia and three in America - the NY office looked like they still hadn't finished unpacking - so I am just a wee bit worried about stability.

Their client - the client I'll be working **at**, is one of the major leagues so I'm not worried about the client paying my new company - I'm just worried about the stability of the middleman.

The job I will be doing is a project lead. I'll be kind of a go-between/ambassador between the client, and the development team in India. I'll be working on the client's site in KOP-PA.

Yes, my friends, I believe this is the way the programming careers are heading.... The big companies are outsourcing the work to small companies, who buy in bulk from smaller countries, where they can get it done much cheaper. But they still need the tech-head translator on staff to run the go-betweens.

Its hard to think positive when you've spent the last three months bidding for programming jobs on sites like getafreelancer.com and rentacoder.com against people from other countries who are happy to work for less than ten dollars an hour.

But I digress. I got the job and signed the contract the same day. The contract had a funky clause in it I'd never seen before. Something about - they have the right to withhold pay, or take deposited funds out of my bank account if the client is unhappy with my work for any reason. I'm not worried that my work won't be up to par... I'm just worried about why that clause was in the contract in the first place. In any case, despite my hesitation, what else do I have going for me? I signed the contract. I will start in less than a week, at ten dollars an hour MORE than I was making in California.

It would be a call for celebration, except my over-anxious mind can easily see a few potential potholes, and since nothing in the last three months has come easy for me, I am feeling extremely trepidacious.

Anyway, back to current events.... Since I only have thirteen cents to my name at this point, and my gas tank is riding the **ever-loving "E"**, I decided it would be best to hibernate in my hotel room for the next few days until my REAL job starts - so as not to risk running out of gas on the boulevard again.

I have a new job. I will be making REAL money again - provided the company's paychecks don't bounce on me.

I am tentatively celebrating. I invite all my friends to tentatively celebrate with me.

August 4, 2004

Keeping responsibility and depression at bay.

I start my new job on Monday. I have much work to do before then. I have to do two websites to finish up my freelance work, find a hotel near NY, read forty pages of documentation on my new job, and so far I've done...NOTHING.

I'm trying very hard to keep responsibility and depression at bay.

They play a tag team pair and continuously encroach upon me.

Nothing can beat them back. Depression encroaches, responsibility rears its ugly head, and nothing seems to make me happy.

I have a hotel room, I have food, what more could I want?

What is wrong with me?

August 7, 2004

In Rah-way (-way the hell out there), NJ.

So my hotel in PA ended at noon today. I had to get closer to my New York job, so I'm staying at a hotel in Rahway, NJ. The hotels are real expensive out here, but at least we have a phone, and a TV. No microwave - so its going to be interesting cooking anything.

I've got just under fifty dollars to commute back and forth to and from NY for the week. Since the train will be \$5.85 EACH WAY - I think I will need a miracle. My friend, Andrea, lent me some money until the 1st; and that paid for part of the hotel. I just didn't think that I would need so much for the hotel AND commute.

My other friend, Kimmy - the singer, brought me food. Oatmeal, peanut butter crackers, soups, and a couple of odds and ends. We thankfully added her contributions to our little food-box.

Later that night Kevin and I pooled our wits and intellect and creatively apportioned our resources. We laid the contents of our "food box" out on the bed and did some serious meal planning. We have twenty-three items including soups, packets of oatmeal, a couple of cans, and some odds and ends. The food that fits into this one foot by two foot by six inches food box needs to last two people the entire week. He doesn't think there is enough food there, but I planned it all out, and we will be fine. If I can swing it, I will still need to buy milk, hot dogs and peanut butter. But I think we'll be fine.

We have only fifty dollars left, and the commute will cost \$58.50.

I was hoping to have like twenty dollars left over to get some thrift-store work clothes and food. This will be interesting.

Wish me luck....

August 8, 2004

Emery boards, dish soap, and a hello kitty rice cooker.

My friend Kimmy brought me a little bit of food to last a couple of days. Oatmeal, PB crackers, soups, and a couple of odds and ends. Some of it requires heating, and the hotel I'm in has no microwave, and no stove.

I have a little Hello Kitty™ rice-cooker.

In the past few days, I've plugged it in and used this little two cup rice cooker to cook soup, boil spaghetti and make a totally "delich" dollar-store spaghetti crab alfredo meal, cook hot dogs, make corned beef hash, make chili and spinach, and oatmeal. I'm even beginning to think I'd be able to reheat pizza in it. (if I had the money to order pizza that is.)

I have a job starting tomorrow. One that requires a "polished look" I have no iron, only two professional outfits that fit, no money for dry cleaning, and my nails have this ridiculous electric blue polish flaking off in the most horrible way. In another world, I'd simply drop of my clothes at the dry cleaners, take a trip to "Wally World," get some clothes that fit, an iron and some nail polish remover, and an appropriate colored nail polish.

But, you make do with what you got. Instead I use Fabreeze™ and a piping hot shower to simulate a steam cleaning and press for my old, wrinkled up, packed too tightly in the van business suit; I use an emery board to file off the inappropriate polish, and the dollar store dish soap we already have to make my scraped and shredded nails shiny again. Many thanks to my boyfriend for his collaboration efforts and ingenious ideas whilst we use our wits and creativity to help get us through these tough times.

Between the two of us, I'm sure we could kill a troll using only a safety pin and glue. Then we could clean it, gut it and filet it with a switchblade comb, dump the meaty bits in the hello-kitty rice cooker and feast for a week.

It's a darn shame fishing licenses are required to fish in NJ.

I miss fish.

August 9, 2004

The big city - (under orange alert.)

My first day at a new job - and thus I travel to New York City. The big city - under orange alert.

The mass transit system - What is ungodly expensive and steeped in misdirection. Two genetically engineered worms have a better chance of solving an algebra problem then I have of getting to my destination in NYC. In bitter confusion and haste, tempered with the deep hope and desire to persevere, I anxiously travel out to Penn Station, just to slingshot back down to Wall Street. I paid \$7.85 one way to get to work, instead of the anticipated \$5.85. A mistake that will lead to budget repression at its finest.

I finally arrived at Wall Street and was successfully heading towards my destination. As the stock exchange building ahead grew larger, the commotion ahead grew apparent. I would not fare too much closer before I would be herded around the block out of sight.

Broad Street misguided away from me, I muscled up the courage to pester several cops garnished with M16-A2s for directions. I was hopelessly lost in the whirlwind of apathetic hysteria as the masses of paranoid yet self-involved drones streamed by me with barely a glance around. My detour found me passing a few cute retriever-type working doggies holding thistley tongues over glistening silver water bowls. I smiled at them. They looked up at me and smiled right back.

As I continued, I noticed several large, refrigerator sized yellow stone pyramids projecting from the sidewalks in a manner of which I had never seen before. I assume they are the futuristic modern day equivalent of cattle guards to ensure people are forced into a single file for herding purposes. I can't imagine that these large tomblike structures aid in hasteful evacuation of the city. Suddenly my mind involuntarily clicks and subtlety whirrs as I perceive that the odd angles of the yellow stones, and the shallow distance between - probably serve as an aid to a proper aim for between the shoulderblades of some perceived threat.

I shudder and continue to my building. Up, almost three dozen floors, I arrived 30 minutes before any of my newly found cohorts. They arrive just before 10 AM. (I do declare...that is just my speed!) I look out the from the 30th floor window and see giant griffins stoutly guarding Trojan soldiers on the next building over. I suppose if the Trojans were to think of suicide, the griffins are there for assurance. Two songs from **Annie** kept running loops in my head... "We've Got Annie", and "I Think I'm Gonna Like it Here". Thank god it wasn't "Maybe." The depression apparent in those lyrics would be too much for me to bear while spending a whole day in this busy streaming city.

After several fights with my computer to install the recommended daily allowance of required baseline software programs, I take the express elevator back down to the bottom floor for a quick puff of cancer. The working dog outside my building and across the street harnessed by the thin Clint Eastwood type I saw earlier - was golden. Now the retriever, held by the same "Make My Day" look-alike, is black.

The doggies have stand-ins.

The phrase "working like a dog" no longer holds any meaning for me.

August 10, 2004

Expecting.

Its lunch-time and I just HAD to get this out, since chain-smoking during the lunch break didn't offer much relief.

Lately, funds have been extremely – I mean EXTREMELY limited.

Its only Tuesday, and I am worried about how I am going to manage to get to work the rest of the week. So, I called the HR manager at the old collections job. The first payday for that old job would be today. I asked if I could pick up my check tonight after work – and they said I'd have to be there by 5 PM. I asked if I could have someone pick up the check for me, and they said I'd have to fax them a written letter of authorization.

One lunch hour later... after some calls, some typing, some faxing, some more calls, and many cigarettes, I'm still trying to calm down.

If there is enough gas in the car to get from New York to Philadelphia and back again, and if there is a check cashing place, or an ACME that cashes checks which is still open when the check gets back to me, and IF the check is for the amount I am hoping for, and IF everything goes all right, then I will have the money to extend my hotel stay for the rest of the week, and I will have the money for the trains back and forth, and I will even have the money to buy a couple of really cheap outfits at a thrift store – that might fit me. Having clothes that actually *fit* would be very nice.

I am in hopeful anticipation of events that may or may not manifest later today. But now that I've expelled some of my fears in writing, I will try to refocus on work.

I have only a few hours to go before I know if I have a place to live, money to get to work, and everything will be OK. Otherwise, its campgrounds and illegal fishing for me.

Now I know how expecting parents feel.

The summit.

She climbed and she climbed - and at last she has reached the summit.

There will be a plateau for a little while - things will still be tight, but I don't have to worry about sleeping in campgrounds (unless I want to.) YAY! And maybe I can even start to afford to sleep in campgrounds as a purely recreational activity from here on in. YAY!!!!!!

I will have the food, train money, and the hotel money to keep working at my new job for the rest of the week. I might even have one more small check before the first of the month, ensuring things are less tight, and a little more comfortable. If not, I have a friend, Jennifer, that I can live with for the following two weeks, and I can take the train from Philly until my first REAL check comes.

Today I was able to reap the fruition of the miracle. I was able to get two shirts and a pair of pants that fit me for work.

Now about those pants I bought today. No wonder I didn't have clothes that fit! The recent stress has expanded my waistline four pants sizes!!!!

Well now that I'm on the plateau - I can stop worrying about where the next meal is coming from, and seek psychological help for that oh so recently gained (no pun intended) minor "There's no money for food" pavlovian trigger of mine.

August 12, 2004

And so it begins again.

The weather today is not good, so my herniated disks and knees are acting up badly. I am in quite a bit of pain. I was very grumpy from my moment of waking his morning. (Apologies to my boyfriend) I wanted to call in sick today, I wanted to lie in bed and die. I did not want to go to work.

Wait a minute, that's just like my old life in California.

When I was in California, I wanted to find a pain support group. I didn't understand how ANYONE could live a life day to day when they are continuously plagued with pain. How do they find the strength to get up every morning? Others must know. There must be other people in this world who live with pain. Well, I never found them.

When I was in California, I survived. Barely. Sometimes I got up in the morning, sometimes I didn't. But this is no way to restart my east coast career. I am no longer stagnating in California. I am reclaiming my old east coast life. I cannot let the old cycle begin again. I have a new job - a great job, and I cannot fall into old California patterns. So, I forced myself to get up & get to work.

I was miserable. I was in pain, grumpy, irritated, full of self-pity and negative feelings, I was walking slower from the pain, and from my state of mind, and ended up riding the later train to work. I changed over to the subway. As expected, the later subway was standing room only. I knew that with my back and knees hurting the way they were, standing in the moving subway train would only aggravate my condition. I was right. With every jolt and turn, I winced with pain. Thirty minutes of this would surely transform me into a vengeful, angry monster for the entire day.

A kind young Asian man, saw the apparent pain on my face, and asked me if I would like his seat. I thanked him for his generosity and sat down. I still hurt with every jolt and turn, but at least it was only my back - and not my knees as well.

When the ride was over, I waited for the exodus of the masses to end, and then took my time to gather my belongings and slowly push myself up to a full stand. I exited the vacant train, and sat for a few minutes on a bench at the station to collect myself.

I used the elevator to ascend the first flight of stairs, and then gathered the courage to try the short second flight of stairs. I made it. I survived the short stairs. But an even longer flight was ahead. I found an elevator to ascend the third level, and began my fifteen minute walk to the office.

When in pain, I crave nicotine. However, I had no light to start the fire. I stopped outside the shell of the World Trade Center (or as its also called - "the big hole in the ground," or "the most available real estate in the city") dodging a plethora of frenzied passer-bys and countless camera incidents. Yes, every day there are still masses people taking pictures of the fenced off area.

I asked a tourist for a light, and he was happy to help. I started walking - and puffing away trying to think of anything that would help the pain. I thought of getting some Burger King hash browns on my way in just to partake of the "comfort food" but I knew I had only enough money for transportation, and a couple of sodas for the day. And so, I walked right past the golden crunchy objects of my desire, and headed further up the block.

At the next bench, I sat down for another rest. I needed a bit more time to recover from the short walk down two blocks. Darn, this pain was just NOT going away. The cigarette and caffeine were not helping. The pain meds would take a while to kick in... I finished my soda and cigarette, and rose to my feet again for another go. I still had about five blocks to go before I would be at work. I walked half a block, whilst pondering how in the world I was going to make a successful attitude adjustment before I got to work. I have a new job now and I want to do well. I don't want to carry my past into my present.

What will stop this cycle?

Well, I began to think. I am blessed with many gifts, as well as cursed with a bit of pain. Today is a day like any other. But on the other hand, it means I have another day to live and work. If I am in pain, but alive, is it not worth it? I'd rather be alive and in pain, than not alive at all. Adjusting, compensating, surviving, focusing, pondering, thinking, feeling.... hmm. I suddenly realize every waking moment is a new chance to begin. I could choose to be happy about life, and happy about having a new day, regardless of the pain.

I turned the corner. A Starbucks™ (go figure.) A man was outside holding a tray. He offered me a little- mini trial sized cup of beverage with whipped cream on top.

Starbucks equals coffee. And I HATE coffee. But, there WAS whipped cream.... He said it was something called a "frappachino". I've never tasted a Frappachino before. I accepted the gift, and tried the new delight.

I took a sip. Bitter and sweet. Just like life.

Three kind strangers helped me through my pain today. Threes. Kind of makes one think that there might be a greater power at work out there.

Today I learned the lesson of "bittersweet." I realized that along with the bad - there is so much more out there to be happy about. I was having a wonderful, beautiful and fantastic day. Although the pain remains, I arrived at work in a good mood - with a smile on my face. And somehow, the pain doesn't seem so bad anymore.

August 14, 2004

Working.... and working some more...

So I'm in NYC for last week and this week – Monday through Friday - to work. I leave about 7 AM, and get home about 8 PM. not too bad. I'm not complaining. I'm rejoicing. I'm actually having the time of my life. This is new and exciting territory for me. As a matter of fact - next week I'm thinking about taking a ferry. It would be my first time ever on a ferry. Life in the big city is great - in short bursts, but I wouldn't want it to continue for too long. I'm beginning to feel a bit - poisoned. Both physically and psychologically.

I'm holed up in this really crappy hotel, but I make due. I cleaned the tiled floor behind the mini motel refrigerator, and found about fifty dead bug bodies. Some were roaches. Ugh, ick! But at least they're dead bugs and not live ones. I'm not sure if I've been feeling nauseous the last week from the dirty room, or the residual of the chemicals which were used to kill the offending critters. In retrospect, I'm really glad Gilgamesh isn't here. My poor lizard would probably have died if she were here. Instead my friend Sarah is watching her for the week.

So, its Saturday now, my first week of work is complete. I took last night, and most of today off to rest and recover to the tune of television, beer, food and chocolate. "sin and decadence" as my love would say.

I ended up mesmerized in a good book, "Artemis Fowl," and a history channel program about the bible code. I'm a programmer, I need a dose of code now and again. Later tonight I'm going to work on my last freelance side-project from 11 PM until about 4 AM, and then I'm off to deliver it to my client in PA starting at 8 AM tomorrow. Then its back to NYC for another week of work.

Given the current circumstances, and the fact that there may be some light at the end of this tunnel, my boyfriend wants to find another (aka: a better) hotel room to live in. In theory, money is supposed to come into my bank account on Monday, and we'll be able to afford to move out of here - but I'm not ready to upgrade my lifestyle just yet. I'm too apprehensive, given what has gone wrong in the last few months to trust that its OK to "move on up" just yet. I'd rather just stay walled in this little roach hole and save money for a few more days.

Six months ago I would have thrown up living in a place like this but now I'm willing - and even wanting to stay. I'm willing to bathe in a tub etched in mold, and walk on bug encrusted floors in bare feet. Its amazing what human kind can adapt to when given little other choice. Take the holocaust concentration camps for example. Our species is even more adaptable that rats.

On the lighter side, we have a little bit of money - and my boyfriend and I went food shopping. We even splurged on an eight-dollar electrical hot plate at "Wally-World," so tonight, we can cook burgers in a frying pan! Burgers! Heaven! My poor little Hello Kitty™ rice cooker will feel terribly neglected.

August 15, 2004

A bright, shining light.

Supposedly my direct deposit will be in tomorrow. I am anxiously awaiting to see if my new job is worth its salt. If all goes OK, there will be about two more weeks of "snug times" but nothing to compare with what I've been through already.

I shouldn't have to worry about gas, food, or a place to live again.

-I'm holding my breath and waiting to exhale.

August 16, 2004

And Exhale!

There was no direct deposit this morning. I had a panic attack.

I pulled out the paystub and noticed the routing number was one digit short. I had another panic attack. I called the bank, they said they didn't see anything to process. I had another panic attack. I rode the train and busses to work - thinking about how in the heck I was going to get to work tomorrow.

I would have to stay at my friend Sarah's house again, and ride the train in from Philadelphia. I knew I would not have enough gas to get to my Sarah's house, so I would probably have to sell something to come up with train and gas money for the week.

I was in planning mode. I brought two pairs of gold earrings with me for just in case. Should the worst occur, I should be able to get sixteen dollars for them.

I arrived in work - thinking I would ask for tomorrow off to get my affairs in order. I showed the human resources guru my copy of my direct deposit form - and the check which was missing one number. He went in to his boss. Five minutes later he came back & told me not to worry. The check does not print the correct numbers, and everything would be fine. Ten minutes later, I called the bank again, and they said the deposit was there safe and sound.

I exhaled.

August 18, 2004

What face does the mirror show you?

In a big brewing city streaming with commuters, you see others so clearly. Every move that is made, every wink, every stare, every twitch, every pulse - you can pick up with eagle-like accuracy. But do you see your own wink? Do you see your own stare? When you twitch a minor muscle, do you see your own subtleties?

To others you are so clear. Transparent, in fact. Every nerve is shown, every fear escapes, every twitch betrays your innermost thoughts and desires. Those who are around you - even the stranger on the street - can study every move you make. They can know every blink, every stare, every twitch, every fear. But to know yourself, to see yourself, you are limited to a temporary reflection in a mirror.

The dull, flat mirror. How can it show your depth and breadth? How can it show the dimensions of you? It shows only a simple reflection. And an observed one at that.

Science tells us that the behavior of any sentient being changes the instant it is being observed. Therefore one can conclude that it is impossible to observe yourself. Your reflexes change upon the simple act of walking up to the mirror.

So how can you see the real you? How can you truly observe yourself and understand your actions with the same clarity that others around you have? When living day to day, when conversing with others, how can you see a line on your face, a twitch of your brow, a pulse of your neck?

If only you could pluck an eye from your skull, and rest it on your bedstand at night. If only you could carry it with you in your briefcase to work. If only you could place it next to your drink at the bar. If only you could rest it on the pew at church. Then you could study yourself as only others can see you.

What face does the mirror show you?

I assure you, whatever face you may think you see.

It is not yours.

August 20, 2004

New York City - The City of Ambivalence.

The last day of my training in New York City. NYC - The city of my ambivalence. The crowds of people - some interesting, some fearful, some angry, some lovely, some listless, some fashionable, some pristine, some colorless, some tattered, some angelic, and some demonic. An empath picks up all of these layers and carries them around as colored, textured chains throughout the next few days. The ambivalence of emotions create a stirring of the soul that unfolds a rich broth and uproots the meaty chunks in a lightly shrouded "Stone Soup."

The two hour commute grates on the soul, as well as the exhausted spirit, of a haggard, hapless, wary, weary traveler. The tangible memories of physical injuries from three years past conjure new protests with each passing twist of the rail lines. The excitement of new discoveries fills the soul with hope as one waits anxiously for the next adventure round the next corner. The chance happening upon a single air-conditioned alley safely hidden in the middle of August between two major corridors tempts one to walk three blocks out of the way each day to bask in its cool refreshing wisps - if only for thirty seven seconds. 'Twas a crisp call to start each new day, and a welcome end to each evening.

New York City. The city of my ambivalence The hatred and the love combined. The joy and sadness. The restlessness and apathy. The experience - and the regrets.

The experience of many people, many cultures, many emotions. Cameras flashing everywhere in a blur of frenzied fancy as tourists trepediciously visit the neuveou wailing wall of the World Trade Center. The intimidating prowess of each tall building, delicately and boisterously designed only a century ago. Each ziggurat created by fuddy-duddy bean counters and brunty builders aspiring to leave their legacy and crown their city with the world-renowned commercial key. The oblivious patriotic flags taunted by each passing breath of clouds soaring so high they cannot see the smog below. The demonstrators, the protests of some injustice in China over three worlds away, the beauty of the very crux of mankind in its pestilence of the earth.

The regrets.

I regret that I never took a ferry. I regret that I never went to the theatre, I regret that I never played chess with the bidders in central park. I regret that I never made it to canal street, or stopped for a beer & slice of pizza in the Newark train station. I regret that I never sought out the seedier jazz elements of the less than privileged not four blocks from anywhere. I regret that I didn't get to see "Stomp," or the statue of liberty.

I was working for two weeks in NYC on a shoe-string budget. I return now to Philadelphia, and will work in a stale, cozy office in the suburbs. I have twelve more days to go before things start to get easier with my first three-quarter pay, and twenty-seven more days to go before my first real, full paycheck. Things will get easier, and then in just a few weeks, I treasure the idea that I can go back up to New York to re-experience the cacophony of emotions, and presume to engage upon every little thing I missed out on.

I can't believe that in just twelve days, I will have the money to pay back people I owe, and still have enough left over to get by for two more weeks. Rejoice, shudder, cry, wail, shout, scream, laugh, and play. All of these await my prodigal return.

Chapter 6:
There and Back Again.

August 23, 2004

Dead tired.

I am utterly exhausted. I'll have but four hours sleep before I start my first day at the client's location tomorrow. I hate to go in sleep deprived, but it couldn't be helped. I just had too much to do in these two short weekend days I was lent.

I packed up the motel, moved from North New Jersey to PA this weekend. Helped Sarah get ready for a wedding, and helped Jennifer clean a trifling mess of an apartment. I got myself over-obligated again, but I did promise. There's no backing out when you give your word. Jennifer's apartment was absolutely the worst I've ever seen. Bugs, filth, food, trash and cat shit everywhere. I mean litter-box sludge covering dinner dishes and silverware! Bugs infesting the kitchen, dining room, living room and bathroom! Trifling. Truly trifling. Ick! I can't believe anyone lives like that!!!

I spent six hours using steel wool trying to scrape the mold, cat sludge and bug scum off only the most important dishes in an almost vain attempt to make them close to fit for human usage again. I don't think this gray gritty sludge will ever come out from under my fingernails. I got home and took a three hour shower. Kevin was there with me at my Jennifer's house. He volunteered to help with the tamer stuff.... Talk about love.

That filthy place reminded me of my days as a veterinary technician. Gently massaging maggots off some poor neglected animal that the owner wanted to keep (keep torturing, keep neglecting.) Some people should just not own pets. Two cases in point.

Today also reminded me of my childhood. It reminded me of the pigsty I grew up in. It was knee deep on this six year old. <*Shudder!*> I never could stand filthiness like that. So like I did then, and like I still do - I stepped up to the plate. Let no one say I'm a "priss." Let no one say I don't get my hands dirty.

I promised Jennifer I would help her clean. I was a cleaning machine. A tornado in reverse.

The prowess I displayed as a child was as alien to my friend now as it was to my own mother so long ago. My mom thinks I was hatched.

August 25, 2004

Goddammit!

Besides my eight hours of work, and two hours of commute, and one hour of prep in the morning, and one hour of prep at night, I think I do an additional four of housework when I get home.

My darling boyfriend tries to do whatever he can to help out; I've got a better man than most. Now based on past experience, I feel like I really need to put something out there - and for those partners who might be open minded enough to want to share the burden of life in this crazy world, and for some of you this will seem like nothing more than typical closed minded, feminist crap, but I just have to say it.

<*Begin soap box transmission*> Its human nature to coast through life expending as little effort is possible. It is human nature to squander our potential to make the world a better place.

Last year I read a very profound statement in a book called ***Don't Sweat the Small Stuff***, "When in doubt about who's turn it is to take out the trash - Go ahead and take it out." It made me stop and think. Life would be better if everyone were proactive enough to help out a little more. The world would be a better and cleaner place if this attitude was carried into the outside world as well.

There are those that are just not very proactive about helping out around the house. And when they see something that might need doing - they procrastinate. The old, "I was gonna get that, but it looks like you've already taken care of it." They know if they can put things off for more than a day or three - someone else will step in and do it. Am I right?

Let's not forget the old, "I don't know how to do that" song. Come on now, you've all heard it. You've all seen it. You know - that half-assed half-hearted attempt of helping out - only because they really, really love you? It's absolutely darling when they try..... However, we know the game, don't we? It's the oldest trick in the book. Didn't we all, as children, use it on our own parents to get out of chores? If you do something half-assed, maybe you won't be asked to do it again. True? Sad that it is still a typical method used when dealing with the prospect of potential housework by grown adults today.

Now for my final point to wrap it all up. I'm starting to believe that a woman is genetically pre-dispositioned to handle more. We're designed to live on brief three hour naps between sucklings. We're designed to keep the house cleaned, spend all day cooking, and raising rug-rats. Its simply the natural order of things.

So what happens to "natural order" in today's world?

What happens, when you take a woman - who was built for 'round the clock labor - and throw her into the corporate world?

THIS:

Why the HELL was I born a woman!?!? Fuck Genetics. Fuck this crazy world. Life is just so unfair. I'm tired.

<*End soap box transmission*>

Everything and nothing

Finding discipline, making the world a better place, striving for new heights, going the extra mile. Creating new ideas, new images, new processes, new art, new poetry... Taking better care of the body and soul so that they last the amount of time they were meant to. Slowly and painfully extracting the buttox from a recently gained sedentary lifestyle. Praying the bubblegum will hold together in the car, the gas tank will remain full, and three squares a day will be forthcoming.

Biding just seven more days for the paycheck to clear the bank... Frantically worrying about what can be done to get the money to get back and forth to work - for just thirty-two more hours.

And then there's just sitting and being. Creating, breathing, manifesting, a few trickles of thoughts mixed with the delicate pulses of energy that abound all around. There's the art of letting oneself be a human being - and not a human doing. Just existing as the very spirit within.

Everything and nothing. Hell and high water, frenzy and fancy. Balance.

I've always lacked balance.

I must be the mountain or the sea. I must remain stable, and subtly react to the winds which blow.

Turning a man into a mountain is a very difficult task indeed.

August 30, 2004

BUGS! (and not the computer type)

My dear friend Jennifer, was nice enough to take Kevin and me in. We'll have to pay one-half of rent, of course, but we'll have a place to stay and a couch to sleep on - until we find our own space. We need to save up a security deposit and try to find a place that is rented by someone who won't care that California totally ripped the shit out of my credit.

So I'm staying at Jennifer's apartment. I moved in Friday night. The whole place had a stench that was just indescribable. Surprise, surprise. For starters, the cat poops on the floor. The sink was filled with litter-box sludge, cat food, people food, mold and maggots, and the whole apartment is just absolutely trifling. I cleaned a bit last weekend - to get a head start, but the tiny dent I made last weekend was nothing compared to what I did this weekend.

Friday night I started again with the kitchen. I BRILLO™ed every dish in the place, to get the sludge, mold, and bug eggs off. Then I put the brillo™ed dishes in the dishwasher with dish detergent and one-half cup of bleach. Finally, I cleaned the dishes again by hand. I ripped everything out of every cupboard, threw away all old and partially opened food boxes, wiped dead bugs off of everything else, using glass plus as an extra precautionary measure. I cleaned out the cabinets with antibacterial cleaner, threw down paper towels as shelf liner, organized, and put the cleaned and sanitized items back in. I cleaned the bathroom and top half of the kitchen on Friday night, and Saturday night. Then last night and today, I did the bottom half of the kitchen, the living room, fridge and freezer.

Oohk. The bottom half of the kitchen. I've experienced nothing worse in my entire life. Now bear in mind... I grew up on welfare. I LIVED in the ghetto. I know roaches, mice, rats, termites, silverfish, ants, and many other common pests by sight. But even with my past experience, I honestly had NO IDEA what I was up against this weekend. I went to clean out from under the sink last night, and I saw strange little black pellets, hmmm. Mouse droppings. What fun. I found a box of Cheerios in the very back of the cabinet under the sink - with not a single Cherrio within. Only little black mouse droppings remained. I found a giant aluminum tin of olive oil with the plastic cap chewed through. The chewed opening left just enough space for the little critter to crawl through, and fall in. I swaggled the can back and forth listening for the telltale signs of a dead oily mouse body hitting the sides within... nothing. Hmm, this place must have been so bad - even the mouse couldn't live here anymore.

I found four hives. Two honeycomb hives, one cardboard type, and one mud type. I found maggots, little white ricey things and larger brown puffed ricey things all over the dishes and carpets. The puffed rice-eggs were even under bookshelves, and other large flat heavy items that it would be difficult for bugs to crawl under. I shudder to think of what might be lying UNDER the carpets. <*Turning green here.*>

I vacuumed the rugs, hit the corners and sides with a broom and the extension hose. I took a scrub brush filled with dish soap to all of the carpets, then sprayed the foamy can carpet stuff on the rugs, then vacuumed again, then used the powder potpourri stuff, and vacuumed again and then sprayed Lysol.

I found these wonderful sixteen legged little mite-like spiders everywhere, ants, flies, little fruit fly thingies that I KNOW were not fruit flies, and a couple of dead roach bodies. Funny, I didn't see any live roaches. Like the mouse, they must have found a more habitable place to live.

I cleaned out the closets, and organized, scrubbed, wiped everything down, and put everything back in. One of the boxes of good china which I found was labeled, "Mitchell Dairy farms - thirty dozen eggs." Oh the irony.

I sprayed RAID - put down all kinds of traps, sprayed Lysol everywhere, bought an OFF outdoor bug repellent candle - burned that for like two hours or so... cleaned EVERYTHING.... and now - aside from the occasional house fly - I think there may be only two or so left in here - the place is relatively bug free.

Then I participated in a fun game of martial-arts cat bathing. Let me just say, "Kitty" doesn't like me much anymore.

After four straight days of labor - thorough scrubbing of every piece of furniture, appliance, dish, hardware, knick-knack, candlestick, animate and inanimate object - this place is starting to look like somewhere someone could live. I have much more to do, but at least I'm not constantly nauseous. The odors are subsiding to more normal levels.

How can anyone live like this? How do I do it? How do I live this dual life where I walk into work as a polished professional - all the while being homeless and living by the grace of friends - right now sharing a friend's bug and critter infested apartment? Why hasn't anyone at the office yet questioned me about my van with expired California plates packed to the brim with nearly every possession I own? When will the gig be up? When will I be discovered and systematically disbanded from work - and without any income, and forced to live in the streets?

When will I realize that my life is starting to get better, and I can stop being paranoid all the time about what monkey wrench will be thrown my way next.

I get paid on Wednesday. Andrea told me she would rent me a three bedroom townhouse (in a really rough neighborhood) for \$800 per month. No credit check, no security deposit. I can get out of this scum infested hell hole, and move right on up to the big-time, a scum infested neighborhood.

When can I start believing that things are looking up?

September 1, 2004

There and back again.

Why the homeless - remain homeless.

So a bout a month ago.... I thought I might someday write a book about one's experience going from everything to nothing and back again.

Right now, I am experiencing everything for the first time. I've been at the place in my life, where my expenses were over \$3000 per month, not including food - which I estimate I probably threw away around \$400 per week on eating out. Chinese - Japanese - Italian - Mexican. Etc.

I've also lived as close as one can comfortably get to the basest of human needs. Yes the needs. Not the desires, but the true needs.

What are the true needs, you ask? Well I can tell you what the true needs are NOT. They are not electricity - they are not gas, they are not rent, they are not hot water, they are not shoes or clothes - They are not more than seven dollars a week for food.

The true needs are baser even than patching up and painting shoes - it is a pure luxury and absolute decadence to be able to warm water in a pot to take a sponge bath. (Once I tried to take a full bath in a cold tub by trying to warm the water with the contents of three teakettles. Let me tell you from experience, it didn't work out too well.)

When you get to the point where you have no other food but bread, mayonnaise and peanuts - and you try to make a peanut and mayonnaise sandwich, then you're getting close to the base of needs. You live for the occasional splurge of welfare pizza. (Recipe: A slice of white bread, tomato paste, and if you're lucky, shreds of "welfare cheese." Nuke for thirty-five seconds - if you happen to have access to a microwave.) The base of human needs is so relatively simple. And in comparison, I was living in the lap of luxury - at ALL times.

Luxury is relative. "Need" is a strong word. You'd be amazed at how little a human being truly "Needs." Imagine everything you owned was burned to a crisp in a fire tomorrow. How much of those possessions do you really "need"? The honest answer? Do you want the truth? Can you handle the truth? The answer is - absolutely none of it.

So, if you own an insurance policy on your home and on your stuff, you may have experienced the exercise of putting a price tag on everything you own. Do you remember that? Do you honestly realize how much you might have spent for all those comfort items you surround yourself with?

Fifty thousand dollars at the bare minimum. \$50K of green. ...and for what?

The comfort you so adore - That comfort is ridiculously expensive.

Yes I had those comforts, I was once making 97K a year. That was "there." Now for "back again."

Imagine that you are restarting your life from nothing. That you were able to find a new job, but everything you own has just been destroyed in a fire. Image you have only you - and your loved ones. No pets, no clothes, no food, no shelter, no hot water, no electricity. Perhaps someone, out of kindness, gave you a tent, six shirts, three pairs of pants, five sets of underwear, a way to make hot water - and that is all. Imagine you are "there."

Imagine that while you are trapped in this meager lifestyle, you must constantly endure the pressure of needing to maintain the facade that you are just like everyone else. Maintain the facade that you own a TV, and that you saw last night's network shows, that you shop where they shop, that you buy what they buy, that you have decent, comfortable clothes that fit, that you have money in your pocket... that you, are just like everyone else.

Imagine that you must maintain this facade sixty hours a week, six days a week. The facade that you live in the same old "yuppie, comfort-zone" world as your peers. Never let it slip, never let it be discovered that although you work a nine to five "Regular Joe" job, you are nothing more than a "homeless bum" in disguise.

It is so difficult to keep up the facade that must be maintained for one to be allowed "back again." The façade that must be maintained to enable someone to climb back up the corporate ladder.

This, my friends, is the very essence of "there and back again." This is why once people fall down, they stay down.

This is one of the reasons that we still have so many homeless in America. This brings me to my final point - and the very crux of this rant. I believe the homeless need support groups. A man (or woman) in this situation needs the friendship, understanding and encouragement of others or they can never hope to achieve again.



Magazine Lies

Plastic people powered by misplaced emotion
stuttering at the eloquence of the silver screen
withering away behind a shroud of misunderstanding
false identities fading from the pages of a magazine.

Drawing and poem by Rebekah Faith

September 6, 2004

A Paradox

I knew that it would be emotionally difficult for me to move back to the Philly area - to again deal with adjusting to attitude differences between east and west coast. Whereas the west coast is far more laid back, flaky, and less aggressive; the people on the east coast are overall so high-strung, so high stressed, so intolerant and so racist.

As an empath, I have trouble walking among those that have feelings of anger, hatred, injustice, and intolerance. It can make me feel like I'm trapped in a twelve year old half-opened sardine can - overstocked with an added bonus of <*insert crazy ad-man voice here*> twenty percent more rotting fish!

My friends live their lives for pointing out faults in others. They elevate themselves in their own minds - whilst prattling away the extra hours in the evening engaging in hour long bashing sessions.

Once upon a time I used to be able to tolerate it. Somehow, the cacaphony of emotions used to roll off my back into the neveryod. But now, I just can't do it anymore. I feel like I'm trapped in the ***They Might be Giants*** song, "Your Racist Friend."

But these are MY friends. Not a one of them I have known less than six years. They are all dear to my heart, yet they spare no-one in their attempt to rip others apart. No race, no sex, no human, no friend, no animal nor individual is safe from the cutting evil words that escape their tongues and blister their ways into my ears. Not even those within the presumed circle of safety - like my other friends or my boyfriend.

What to do!?!?

I have grown beyond the ability to tolerate my own friends - but they are my friends. I must accept them no matter what.

I feel like I am living a paradox. I am intolerant of intolerance, and therefore, QED hating myself.

I went to "Barney-Knowbles" today and picked up some calm Buddha, meditation & philosophy books to see if I can't, despite my surroundings, evolve to a deeper level of tolerance, and despite my surroundings, create an environment of calm within my soul.

September 7, 2004

On Karma*

Karma is not a cosmic repercussion for man's deeds.

Karma is the very reaction within the man's soul of every deed that is done.

No man is ever completely formed. His evolution is a constant progression. With every act that is completed - comes the formation of feelings.

Guilt, anger acceptance, happiness, desire, love, hate, truth, and rage. Each result is a new emotion which is imprinted - instantaneously. Each emotion rings its own pavlovian bell - and strives to enforce the habits of the man. Therefore each deed that is done - furthers the lines of the blueprints of his being. Every act that is completed by the man - drives a nail into the coffin holding the formation of his very soul.

A man's karma is - the **active** creation of his being.

So every act that you achieve, every thing that you do,

ask yourself – Are you creating yourself in the image that you desire?

September 8, 2004

Gears keep a turnin.

I worked until 8:30 last night, 7:30 tonight, got home, did a little more work, and then prepared for my conference call to the project developer in India. Just got off the call now, and its almost 1 AM. I gotta be back in at 8 AM to start it all over again. There's so MUCH to catch up on - I suppose first is creating the documentation for, testing, and distribution of one software patch - then I have to further define the requirements on ten items for the next patch.

In other news, I just heard that my contracting company is sending out a check to pay for my New York City expenses and tomorrow I have to make sure my supervisor received my signed timecards for the last two weeks - and sent them over to the correct place.

I looked at two apartments this weekend. One was "eh, OK I guess..." and the other was "WOW... I WANT this place!" they're both around the same amount - but the difference is just Oh so radical. I got a call yesterday. I have approval for the "Eh" apartment, its not a nice apartment, but its better than hotels, and sleeping on friends' couches.

*Inspired from reading **Buddhist Reflections on Everyday Life – A Deeper Beauty** Pramanada – Barnes and Noble publishing.

It took me four days - and a nervous breakdown - and nearly an aneurysm, but finally this morning, I just turned in the application for the other apartment. (The really nice apartment that Kevin and I are totally in love with.) Its really amazing, really funny how 'twas no problem to give out all the numbers on site for the "Eh" apartment, but the one you really hope and dream for - creates all this anxiety and makes it darn near impossible to fill out and send a simple rental application. I was nearly paralyzed in my effort to get what I needed to do - done on this one. Today, I finally managed it. Kevin helped keep me calm during a major breakdown when I couldn't find a phone number, and I was two hours late to work delivering the paperwork to the landlord, but its done, its over, and now I wait for the results of what the fates have in store. Hopefully I'll hear by Friday.

What is it with man's fears to aspire to his dreams? What is that paralyzing anxiety - that dread that what you dream - might actually come to pass?

I saw it in a movie once..... The theory is - the dream is better - so a man can never realize his dreams lest he has nothing more to live for.

But I digress. I have a place to move into on the 16th. Whether its the shack that was easy to get - cause I didn't give a rat's ass if I got it or not - or the really nice place that I nearly had a breakdown over.... it doesn't really matter in the end, does it?

Its over, there's a weight of three tons lifted off of my heart, and now I wait.....

The ol' cliché ---> So much to do, so little time. I'm buried in work - and more work.

I wish this weekend would get here already.

Chapter 7:
Surfer's End.

September 9, 2004

The sun rises.

The sun rises. It was a slow start... After last night's midnight conference call to India, I felt a little groggy & didn't want to wake up this morning.

But now I feel absolutely fantabulous. No matter what, I have a place to call my very own where I can move in in just one week.

Whether its the little dinky place with the rough edges, or the really nice one I'm hoping for, it has finally sunk in - that whatever it is, it will be MINE!

Now to name the pseudo-housewarming party I will have after I'm all moved in. Housewarming doesn't quite cut it, does it? Its more of a "I'm restarting my life, I now have a job, and I'm no longer homeless" party. Its more of a "I was so miserable in California - but now I'm retaking what is mine" party. Its more of a "coming again" party. Its more of a "She's back! With a vengeance!" party. Its more of a "batton down the anchor - she's staying a while. No longer a gypsy, no longer couch surfing, for the next two years - she's planted" party.

Its more of a "She's making real money again, and She finally has a place to live" party.

So I was thinking –

The K & R Bouce-Back-Bash at 'Surfer's End'.

Of course I would hang a gigantic surfboard on the wall at the new place to signify that the couch-surfing days are finally over.

September 9, 2004

The magnetic plate.

I'm always there to step up to the plate. To do what needs to be done. To clean - to do dishes, to wash carpets, to clean mouse droppings out from under the sink, to clean litterboxes....

It seems like - I am polarly charged to the plate. It seems like others around me - are polarly charged to the idiot "boob-tube" and repelled from stepping up to the plate.

What I wonder is - why it feels like no one else comes even close to pulling their own weight? Why does it always feel like I'm carrying 80% of the load, and anyone else might come along and help me out by pushing me from behind, or else - hinder by sitting on top of the pile and tossing down their used candy wrappers. It feels like the only way to get a helping hand is to scream my bloody head off - or else have a breakdown.

Dust mites, anyone?

Its 3 AM and the cat just puked again. I've cleaned four occurrences of cat vomit since I've gotten home from work today - and it's not even my cat. My clothes are hanging in the living room. I wonder if when I go to work tomorrow, my clothes will have bathed in the foul odor long enough to assimilate its stench. To that end, I fear that a humiliation which should not be mine to receive will be mine despite my best karmic efforts to do what others will not. Dust mites anyone? Scrubbing carpets have the same effect on me as changing vacuum bags. I am endlessly sneezing.... sneezing.... sneezing. I warm a bowl of soup in a vain attempt to clear my sinuses, and settle my soul. Very soon, I hope that sleep will have its way with me. The workday starts far too early in the morning for my liking.

September 11, 2004

Celebrate with me!

WE GOT APPROVED FOR THE COOL PLACE!!!

As long as my work doesn't make any mistakes with my pay, we will have the money to move in on Thursday.

K&R's Bounce-Back-Bash at Surfer's End is tentatively set for Saturday October 2nd. Let me know if you're on the east coast - and you'd like to help us celebrate the fruitions of a new start.

Thanks to you all for your encouragement and kind words that helped us through all of this.

Figures...

Right now I'm a bundle of nerves over this apartment thing. I'm meeting the landlord tomorrow to give him a deposit - and then I worry about my check coming in at the right amount so I'll have all the rent to move in on Thursday.

My thoughts are frenzied, my hands are trembling. I have trouble typing, and I can feel the pulse of anxiety throughout my whole body. Just a guess - but I'll bet my blood pressure is higher than 190/105. I'm holed up in a corner - my eyes frantically darting around searching for the littlest thing to go wrong. My mind is trying to anticipate what new obstacle will be thrown in my path.

My mind is my own worst enemy. I need someone to tell me that everything will be OK.

September 13, 2004

Oh yeah, I forgot.

I just realize that I have forgotten a very important thing.

I have been frozen with anxiety and worry over this apartment thing. I have done everything I can do and now I wait.

Wait to see if my check comes in correctly, wait to see if its processed correctly, wait to see if the landlord will be there with the lease on Thursday, wait till Thursday to hand over the money and sign the lease so I can start moving in.

I have told myself over 100 times this morning that its pointless to worry about things that are out of my control. I have done everything I can, and to worry about the rest - is silly. Yet I am still a neurotic, allergic, mess.

I know that worrying doesn't make anything different, but for some reason, I just can't stop myself. I just can't seem to disengage my biological worry chip! I'm stuttering, klutzy, shaking, sweating, I feel like every muscle in my body has been tensed for two months straight. I'm a total and complete mess.

Then I remembered something. The keys to life: are pro-activity, and FAITH.

When you have done all that you can - yet you still worry - you are lacking FAITH. Faith that everything will work out. Faith that whoever or whatever it is that you need to believe in - Whoever or whatever it is that makes the universe work - will take over and do the rest perfectly - as they always do. Faith in God, faith in energies, faith in goodness, faith in life, whatever faith it may be, mankind cannot live without faith.

I was frozen with anxiety because I had forgotten about faith.

How ironic that Faith is actually my middle name.

September 15, 2004

The big day

Tomorrow is the big day.

At around 10 AM I will check to see if my direct deposit came in OK. Then I will know if I can move into my new home.

-fingers crossed.

September 16, 2004

All moved in...

I have a home. I'm all moved in. I slept here Thursday and Friday. I can't believe I finally have a home again.

September 20, 2004

Changing feelings

The past year has been a year of great change for me.

Everything that I once knew to be true was challenged time and again. My residence, my friends, my life, my work, my feelings, my attitudes, my ideals, my values, my standards, my environment. Everything has changed. If I thought the last three years of my life was a trial, then the last six months have been an inquisition.

In the last three years I've dealt with all of the following - an auto accident, herniated disks, bad knees, eye surgery, moving cross country to another world, breaking up with a boyfriend of ten years, finding a new beau - who left, rediscovering nature, my abilities, and the outdoors, spending some time on my own discovering myself, discovering philosophy, discovering alcohol, and then finding a new boyfriend.... Then in the last six months I discovered the SCA, a group of people that regularly reenact the renaissance era - which meant finding another means to express myself, losing my job, near homelessness, extreme poverty, then finding a job, finding a home, and finally... disenchantment again.

If nothing has tried me more in my life than the last three years, then NOTHING has tried me more in my life than the last six months.

To paint a mini picture of my recent disenchantment, let's take the SCA for example. Not six months ago - I thought it was the coolest, grooviest idea and group of people in the world. I found other people and a place to do swordfighting, learn languages, learn ancient arts and crafts, reconnect with nature, and get back to the basics. The magnitude of my discovery was just unfathomable.

But with my recent dose of reality, poverty & near homelessness in the last six months, I have begun to feel that even the SCA is yet another commercialized, political organization where you must spend a lot of money on material things that, like the rest of the world, means nothing in the end.

The back to basics mentality that I so adored not six months ago. The very idea that civilization could come to an end, and there would be a group of people that would thrive and prosper using the ancient arts and crafts now seems like nothing more than a group of people who regularly practice a very odd and improbable form of self-aggrandizement.

The journey from everything to nothing and back again has left me sitting yet again with the same question with which I started.

In life; What REALLY matters?

September 23, 2004

Ick. ...As in Sick.

I'm sick. I've had a sore throat for like two weeks, but I woke up this morning and my throat was very painful and swelling shut. Yikes! Tried to make a doctor's appointment - but no one could see me today. Tried to go to a clinic - but I didn't qualify to get treatment. They said I should go to the emergency room.

Emergency room for a sore throat. What is this world coming to?

I called out from work - no good cause my patch release is due out Monday. But I've been working myself to death and I really need to recover.

The ER. Just what I'll need. Another thousand dollar bill while I'm trying to restart my life. But, it had to be done. After I got home from the ER - I took a short nap and then....

Curse my overactive obsessive compulsiveness. Kevin tried to stop me - he said I should be in bed resting... but we now have a clean kitchen.

September 25, 2004

Changing times.

I'm changing.

I am not the same person I was three months ago.

I do not want the same things. I do not have the same goals, I do not have the same dreams, I do not have the same desires.

How does this affect my relationships with those around me?

September 26, 2004

An opportunity.

And so I have another opportunity to rediscover myself.

To find out who I am all over again - despite the way circumstances have changed me in the last three years and especially in the last six months.

Where to begin?

Lets start with the five fingers of happiness.

Family and Friends, Career and Money, Health, Love, and... oh, bother! I can't remember the last one. It must have to do with self. I'm always neglecting self.

So let's start with what do I want to do. Is it still the same?

Travel - travel is important to me. Be it through programming contracts, through SCA, or through a singing career, or just plain being rich enough to go on holiday once a month 'round the country and 'round the world. However I do it, travel must be done.

Fame - Singing was always important to me. Once upon a time I wanted to be the first Female Rock star that attained a Freddie Mercury level of stardom. This meant touring the country (back to that travel thing) and everyone loving me. (Back to that self-esteem thing.) Now, I just don't know anymore. I enjoy making up and improvising melodies, I suppose I'd like to make my own songs on the computer and distribute them - but I'd also like to put out a book of poetry and art. Singing just isn't as important to me as it once was.... I guess what **IS** important is leaving that all-telling mark - the Yes, I did exist on this planet -mark. The one that after I die says, "I was here! Now what are you going to do about it?!"

Singing - I once heard *Depak Chopra* say - "Take for a career what you are passionate about. Whatever it is that you can do that makes you lose all sense of time." This used to be singing. So what am I doing working as a computer programmer?

Knowledge - I thrive on the how's and why's of the universe. Philosophy, Astronomy, Chemistry, Microbiology, Physics, Engineering, electronics, computers, computer programs, computer viruses, etc. I'm now working in a company where everyone seems to be a little more nomenclatured than I in my current field. I'd really like to maybe study for a couple of certification tests, just to feel more secure in my current position. It's not important to my life - but it is important to my career. And if I'm going to get the money for TRAVEL from my career, and not singing or teaching English, then I guess I'd better put my study hours in to make myself more marketable.

Health - Just once I'd like to be able to fit into a bikini. Ideally, I'd like that day to come before I turn forty. I'd really like to overcome these bad knees and herniated disks, I'd like to be as limber as I was when I was a teenager on the gymnastics team, I'd like to have a body like Jennifer Lynn's, oh hell, I'd just like to be in a little better shape than I am now. I'd like to wear clothes again that are not from the plus sized - recycled curtains and bed-sheets department. I want to wear cool clothes again. I'd like to fit into the other half of my wardrobe that I bought not eight months ago.

Self - I am every woman. I am the "Harley Chick." I am the career professional. I am the community leader. I am the actress. I am the singer. I am the backpacker. I am the animal lover. I am blue collar. I am white collar. I am eccentric. I am the freak. I want to continue to better myself - and once I get settled, start getting more involved in the community again.

Love - It doesn't need to be stated, but let me just put it down for clarity's sake. I want the man that accepts the every woman in me. The "Harley Chick," the career girl, the community leader, the singer, the backpacker, the eccentric, the freak, the rich and the poor. But more than that - I am sure the man I have chosen has the ability to be the every man who can stand tall beside the every woman in the situations which demand adaptability in life.

Mental Health - I am growing towards the person who can be the fish in the sea. I strive to be better at controlling my anxiety, fears, worries, mood swings, and sense of impending doom enough to be able to relax and just be. I strive to be forgiving of myself, my past, and my fears. To not punish myself with undue and endless tasks and chores created for me by a matron of self loathing. To learn to accept myself as I am - not push too hard for perfection, settle down, and just flow with the tides.

I strive for a day when I can live for twelve hours without every muscle in my body clenched, my blood pressure through the roof, my heart palpitating, and my mind racing trying to predict the next cloud or storm. I am striving for CALM.

Re-reading the above, I am astonished at how the more things change - the more they stay the same. I am not a completely different person. I was just a little lost, that's all.

I feel this is enough work for one day. Let me think a bit - and then try to outline just a few small steps to accomplish a better me.

September 27, 2004

Daily work

In every religion or self-help book one reads one finds the common phenomenon of daily devotions, daily thoughts, focus groups, daily meditation etc.

What is the common purpose for such endeavors?

Every religion and self-help book known to man - is a tool for personal/spiritual growth. It makes use of time to refocus on what is really important and to start and end the day with a clear head and clear conscious.

Even Benjamin Franklin by his own retelling in his autobiography set aside ten minutes every morning and every evening to review his thirteen virtues - and the questions, What good shall I do today, and What good have I done today?

An undisciplined louse such as I - one who has never stuck to such a routine for more than ten days at a stretch, shall try to forgive and start once again to attain a daily routine to help her grow.

Here are some good candidates for my ten minutes in the morning and in the evening. Some small tasks to keep me focused and growing:

1. Stretching & back/knee exercises for those oh so herniated disks and bad knees.
 2. Focusing on the beauty of life and the miracle of who I am and that I am still alive, and the thought that whatever happens, life will work as it always has. I can only do my best - and my best is good enough.
 3. Relaxing and doing nothing.
-

I suppose one-half hour of goal oriented work during the day is in order as well. This should probably include one of the following:

1. studying for a certification test
2. writing music on the computer,
3. drawing an illustration for the poetry book,
4. doing a bit of a small workout to get back into shape,
5. doing a bit of impassioned perusing of knowledge. (Chemistry, physics, astronomy, philosophy - whatever suits my fancy for the time.)
6. Reviewing what I have learned in the past - so as not to be a victim of this lovely steel sieve abyss of a memory of mine.

Can she do it for more than ten days? That is the question.

September 28, 2004

Stop, listen and breathe

So last night, I started to feel that bit of anxiety again.

The feeling that sets my mind reeling into what was it that I did wrong. The feeling that sets my mind spinning over every possible thing in the last twenty some odd years (and odd years they were) to try and determine what it was that I could have possibly done wrong that I should feel guilty about now.

After forty-five seconds of panic and guilt ridden anger, I came to my senses and realized that it was happening again.

I stopped it. Took a deep breath, and listened to the universe.

Whatever it was - its in the past. There's no need to hash up the old feelings. I must forgive and move on.

It was the first time I can recall - that I made a step to control my anxiety - instead of the other way around.

And it worked.

September 29, 2004

I am so screwed.

Last night my car's engine got soaked in a major downpour. It flooded out. She wouldn't start this morning. To make matters worse - I don't even have \$2 until Friday. If I could only get a friend to drive me to the bank so that I could get the sixty dollars I have out, I'd be able to make it back and forth to work tomorrow and Friday.

As it is - I have a patch release due Friday, and no way to get back & forth to work.

I am so screwed.

Friend in shining armor

None of my friends could drive me to the bank before it closed, but Kimmy was able to stop over and lend me bus money for the next two days.

Friday I get paid

I don't have to worry now.

It will be OK.

I'll fix up my car

with my paycheck on Friday

that was a haiku.

September 30, 2004

The wheel stops rollin when you stop the wheel.

I came home so charged to do work today...I have TONS of work to do tonight. I have so much to do, that I could conceivably work until 5 AM. But instead when I got home, I cooked dinner, and decided to finish the last one-half hour of the movie I was into for the last few days. Now I can't seem to get the wheel started again.

The beau keeps insisting that I work too hard, That I tend to burn myself out. He keeps insisting that I take a break once in a while- but when I do take a break - that's it. I'm done. I just can't seem to get moving again.

It would seem as if I'm always treadin' uphill; which makes it an impossible task to get started again once I sit down for two seconds.

Just goes to show: The wheel stops a 'rollin when ya stop the wheel. I'm screaming inside, "I CAN'T AFFORD TO TAKE BREAKS YET!"

Wait a minute - that's not the real issue. The real issue is a more ingrained problem. I've got to learn to be more genteel with myself. I've got to learn how to stop and restart the wheel. I've got to learn how to work at a sane, normal pace - instead of the hyper-overdrive burnout pace that I've tended towards my whole life (and especially in the last six months.)

How does the rest of mankind deal with this?

Are there any other obsessive-compulsive, all or nothing, do or die, ya rest when yer dead, type-freaks out there like me?

October 1, 2004

All done.

I'm done my work for the night. Unless the developer in India calls me. I'll get a few hours rest before the AM.

I'm beginning to think it is better sometimes to get the work done first, so you can have the time AFTER to relax and enjoy.

I must be growing up or something.

October 5, 2004

The road to Florida and back - in one weekend.

We needed to get some furniture and clothes of Kevin's that he had left in a storage unit in Florida. So we decided to take a road trip to Florida over the weekend.

We drove from Pennsylvania to Florida and back in one weekend. Ugh, I almost died.

We left Friday night at 8 PM, drove through the night to Florida. Arrived in FL at 4pm Saturday. Then Kevin and I packed up the van with his stuff, and took off for home again around 8 PM Saturday. We took twelve hours to get through GA, cause while I was lost in Georgia, he was lost in dreamland. Directions out of that peachy state were elusive and non-forthcoming. We drove all of Sunday, and finally got in Monday morning at 1 AM.

No sleep - no rest. Everything that should have been white that I could see was hazed by shades of purple. In sheer exhaustion, I saw shadows and stars, and black blotches, shapes and ghosts. Sleep was using its jackhammer to try and get through to me, yet somehow, I would not let my eyes close. I have no idea what fueled me to get home.

I remembered a story. "The Long Walk" - by **Stephen King**. I could feel the story resurfacing on the road right in front of me. Those that stop - are shot. The only choice is to press on, no matter how exhausting, how much pain, how much collusion and confusion, how much fear, anger and hatred. With newly formed demons of irrational, mental exhaustion - dwelling, nay- beleaguered at my door - I enlisted in "The long drive." I know at some point during that trip - I died - Yet a parallel version of me was given the chance to continue my life in another reality.

I promised I would never torture myself in this way again.

Man can do amazing and seemingly impossible things when he is called to do them, but the body will still react adversely to being mistreated as such.

Now I am depressed.

I have no reason to be - except that I am very tired, exhausted, and I feel like I need about a month in the hospital to recover.

I feel like I am a very tired hamster - who has been pushing a freight train uphill for the last six months straight.

October 7, 2004

Taking it easy - yet still making progress.

I learned a hard lesson driving to Florida and back in one weekend. I only have one body, and I really mustn't push it so hard.

For the last few days I've been taking it easy. If I take work home, I stick to under two hours. I make sure and take a break between work and work. I still do dishes and cook, but I'm not so frantically frenzied about getting everything done in one night.

There's a fine balance between being productive, getting what needs to be done, completed; and not overworking yourself. I must remember that there's always tomorrow.

This week I'm restraining myself on purpose. I'm done overdoing it. I'm done burning out, and spinning myself into sickness. Once I stabilize in my new routine of less frenzied productivity and more calm and restrained living, then next week I shall add my small (SMALL mind you!) daily goal items.

Maybe step ever so slightly back into a club - or my music.

MAYBE.

One or two items next week... and that's all. One step at a time.

Baby steps anyone?

October 10, 2004

A DESK!

I have a DESK!

Its the little things in life that are so darn important.

I just moved into this place... and until yesterday I was using three computer towers, two as legs and one as a tabletop to put my monitor on. It was quite literally a "computer desk" built from computer towers. My chair was a milk-crate, and my printer-stand and mouse-pad area was a cardboard box.

Now I have a DESK and a filing cabinet. I'm so happy!

October 13, 2004

Living beyond your boundaries.

So many of us live enchanted, yet predictable lives. So many of us have never even moved outside the state where our relatives live. We have never been separated from the guidance of our friends. So many of us have never been truly on our own. In short, so many of us have never discovered ourselves.

We are so comfortable with our routine - so comfortable with the ordinary that we are afraid to step outside and discover who we really are. What makes us tick.

In that fated moment of fight or flight - what makes us fight... (or fly?) In that fated moment of life or death - what makes us live... (and why?)

Ever been to burning man? Ever found the child or the devil within? If not - then how can you say you know who you are? I'm not saying alcohol or drugs is the answer, - but I am saying that taking risks and going beyond your own boundaries and discovering something new about yourself is something everyone must do.

Do whatever makes you LIVE. Live as you - as only YOU can. Do whatever peaks your individuality whatever makes you stammer and clamber for your next breath, for your next solution. If that's through a tour, or a convention, or a hike, or a road trip... whatever makes you discover who YOU are is a good thing.

Ever had to walk fifteen miles in the freezing cold - to get to civilization - knowing that if you didn't walk all night to find a destination of warmth - you'd freeze to death that night? Ever sell all your worldly possessions and start over again from nothing? Ever take a month off and hike across country? You know, something like that.

This weekend - I call upon every reader to do something that you know you CAN'T do. And live through it.

Amen.

October 18, 2004

Sick and tired and achy and cold. Oh my!

So for the last two months, I've been cold and tired and achy and sick and feeling like I'm going to die all the time. Kevin is starting to worry about me. I just think its normal recovery for anyone who lived three years in California and was homeless for a while. Now that the dust has settled, and I'm doing fine - my body's trying to catch up on all the times I couldn't let it break down.

What do you think. Am I normal? Or should I seek medical/ mental attention?

October 22, 2004

Down, down, down.

I'd love to say that life sucks and I feel like shit.

But I can't say life sucks, cause after what I've been through the last six months or so - compared to that, life now is much better.

The worst is behind me, and I'm sure the worst could have been much worse than I could imagine.

So, like I said.... I'd love to say it.

I can't say it... but I sure can't help feeling it.

October 23, 2004

My scissors and me.

I just put some style back into my hair and cut off the dead ends.

Every time I feel things are changing - a haircut really helps me come to grips with the changes in my life.

My new haircut says I've cut off the dead bits and I'm ready to take on the world again.

October 27, 2004

God's gift of a burnt out hard drive.

A burnt out hard drive at work is a major crisis and a tragedy to an executive who has international deadlines to meet.

On Monday - I tried to boot up my computer at work - spent two hours on the phone with help desk - and another hour on the phone with Dell - only to find out that my hard drive in my desktop at work was effectively KAPUT. There was nothing they could do - except ship me a new one - whilst I put a call in to help desk to have the new drive imaged, whenever it would arrive.

As there was nothing else I could do at work, I went home - and frantically tried to configure my home computer to do the job it needed to do to complete my work. I fretted and flailed about, cursed and stormed, violently caught in a vane attempt at configuring this old girl until 2:30 Tuesday morning - with no profitable results.

Tuesday – I called Helpdesk AGAIN - and found that they had LOST my original trouble ticket - and that if I created a new one for someone to come out to image the new hard drive, it could take up to a week. Warning! Breaking point here!

Coupled with the stress of the last six months - and the fact that I find myself AGAIN with not even a dollar to my name which needs to last me over six days and almost no cigarettes, I found myself in a deep depression - and resorted to the basest of human needs. Eating, sleeping, and checking work e-mail.

I napped, I checked e-mail - I ate, I checked e-mail - I napped - I checked e-mail - I ate some more - and checked more e-mail, napped more, checked more e-mail - and slowly but surely, I found the hard cold edges of wretched reality melting away all around me. I found myself over the last three days unwinding from a tightly spindled spool of kite string into a loose pile of yarn tossed in abandon across the entire house.

A giant sigh escapes my soul as I realize: I may have no money, tragedy may yet be right around the next corner, but for now I am safe - and I have a bed, a phone, and chocolate cake. What else truly matters in life?

Over the last couple of days, I went from a high strung, high stressed executive suffering from occasional (albeit nearly frequent) bouts of raging terrets syndrome, (and dangerously high blood pressure) to a normal human being who finally completed reading Neil Gaiman's "American Gods."

There is a sentence in that book I just read which was meant to be written about a magical place of amusement - yet it struck me as if it were actually written about life. **"When they leave, they leave bemused, uncertain of why they came, of what they have seen, of whether they had a good time or not."** Neil Gaiman - American Gods

So now, at this moment, instead of being a flea's toenail away from needing a mental hospital stay, God's gift of a burnt out hard drive - enabled me to slow it down, relax and enjoy. A much needed gift after an intense six months of stress.

Thanks!

November 5, 2004

Driving with the blinders on.

Its so easy to go about the daily life - driving with the blinders on. With all of the priorities that get in the way - who has time for bubble baths, reading a good book and getting involved in the community? Yet in life - which of these things is more important - a work deadline, a vacuumed floor, or a camping trip?

At the end, when I look back on my life, I'd much rather remember bubble baths, books and camping trips than work deadlines and dishes and vacuuming. I'd much rather remember building houses for people, and volunteering with kids and animals than staying up till 4 AM for software development meetings in India.

No one is responsible for my memories but me. Those trips to the YMCA swimming pool and hot tub - and those daily focus/meditation minutes I was planning to keep me on track of what I really want? I haven't had time for any of it. I need to make more time for the quality things in life. I need to make sure my life will be something I enjoy remembering.

Unfortunately, one could say that a person has to choose between being wealthy and being happy. But I know there's a balance in there somewhere. If I could just take the blinders off and stop running on autopilot from one task to another, I'm sure could see it.

November 10, 2004

A new kitty.

I have a little kitty.

An older woman had put an ad in the paper about some kitties that were born that she was feeding. They were outside kitties, but very sweet and very tame.

So we went to check her out - she was the same shade of black that disappears into the shadows. But when we picked her up - she'd try to nuzzle in and disappear into our arms.

We went to the pet store - picked up all the essential kitty supplies, brought her home, introduced her to her new accommodations, and let her walk around the house and explore a bit.

Now we needed a name.... It couldn't be just any name, it had to be something that matched her look, her personality, and something that she would like and respond to.

So we started calling out the obvious:

Shadow...

Storm....

Sasha...

Isis...

Miss Stophelies...

nothing.

Sangra...

Storm...

Whisper...

Sabrina...

Freya...

nothing.

Then a flash of acknowledgment ran through me. I trepedaciously called, "Loki...." and she looked up. Kevin, from the other room, calls: Storm.... Storm... Storm! (well, we know what HE wants to call her...) Then in a moment of resignation, he calls, "Loki..." She runs on over to him.

OK, so now we have a Norse god of chaos and mischief living in our home in female kitty form. I'm thinking of changing her spelling though - so as not to invoke the actual Loki every time we call her.

A friend of mine suggested Loquii.

I think I like it.

November 20, 2004

Turkey day.

Kevin and I are states and states away from our relatives this Thanksgiving. We posted up a message that if there are any other friends out there in the Philly area that are in the same situation, we will be hosting T-Day at our house and all are invited. We're waiting for responses to see if we have an event or not yet.

November 25, 2004

Turkey day preparations.

So what I have done so far: The pumpkin pie, the apple pie, the chocolate soufflé, the vanilla creme pie, the cranberry sauce, homemade mashed potatoes.

Way to go me!

These were all done in under seven rolling rocks....

What I still need to do tomorrow: The candied yams, the onioned green beans, the corn, I would have done candied carrots and potatoes the Danish way - but I decided instead that I must save some goodies for another day, you know?

I still have to do the stuffing, the gravy, the dinner rolls, and finally, the turkey (I was thinking of a duck or goose or Cornish game hens - but didn't know how company would take such non-traditionals, so I went with turkey after all.)

The thought occurs, I need way, way, way, way.... more alcohol.

(I hope there's a store open tomorrow so I can get more BEER!)

Happy Thanksgiving Everyone!!!!

November 26, 2004

A happy, happy kitty

I am a happy, happy kitty. I had a really great thanksgiving and I have a lot to be thankful for.

Consider:

After my computer programming contract ended in the spring, I moved out here from California with \$200 in my pocket and only what possessions fit in my van. Let me tell you - that was not a lot at all. No dishes. No kitchen stuff (except a can opener and a rice cooker), one-half of my book collection, one-third of my movies, one-half of my CDs. Only what clothes fit and were appropriate for work, and the most comfortable bum equipment. My musical instruments, my art, my poetry, my lizard in a ten gallon tank, and a few memories. The barest of essentials. That was May.

June and July my dreams for travelling around the country on three to six month contracts were placed temporarily on hold while I did whatever temp work I could find until I could get a "real" computer job. I lived in motels, I lived with friends, and scrounged and scrimped whatever I could for food, gas and smokes. remembering the time not so long ago when I was considering shoplifting toilet paper, milk and a plunger from a grocery store. Built up my wardrobe and living essentials from flea markets, dollar stores and thrift stores.

August came and I found a new computer contract.

Now its November and I have a wonderful home, a wonderful boyfriend, I have some new friends, as well as some very good old ones, I have enough dishes and food to complete a wonderfully excessive thanksgiving dinner, and I have a kitty.

I am still working on my dreams of singing, touring the country and creating my book. The work alone is the most important thing.

As for now, I have made it from everything to nothing and back again.

I am very, very thankful.

Picture still in scanner.

Warrior Spirit

She sits at peace and waits for the wind
It guides her to her heart
Where deep underneath a spirit lies
Ready to wake again

Her past deliberately laid to rest
Her future calls ahead
The warrior spirit dare not budge
Until the moment is there

Her spirit rises to meet the day
Her staff held high above
The wind calls out Gently to her soul
And tells her to go ahead

Charging across the goldenrod plains
She is the stallion horse
There is no man, nor god nor bear
Who's power could near compare

A tower of fire proceeds her there
Lightning follows her heels
Her ring of destruction runs through the land
To clear it for worlds anew

It is, as was, will be predicted
The purest of heart will win
And as each foe is fallen to rest
in her they never will die

Another conquest now accomplished
She calls into the wind
With sacred blood painting her hands
She raises her staff again.

Art and poetry by Rebekah Faith

My biggest mistake was not the over-commitments. My biggest mistake was not the burnout periods. My biggest mistake was not the fits, the tantrums, the anger, the screaming and the crying.

My biggest mistake was my state of mind during these trials. My biggest mistake was during these times of overstressed burnout; that I was secretly thinking of myself as a failure, and thinking myself to be weak, pathetic, and unfit.

If I can just remember that I am doing my very best, and that I have done a remarkable job under the circumstances so far, and I am doing a stellar job building a life raft in these murky waters, this outlook alone will carry me through the last mile.

Only one mile to go....