



May 24, 1993

I had my reconstructive surgery this morning. It hurt so bad Mama. I have been sleeping most of the day due to the pain pills, but if it helps take away my burns and scars so I don't get made fun of as much, it will be worth it. Not to mention getting punched and kicked, and stuff. When I was beat up the last time in March that was it for me, and made me decide to go ahead with this, even though I was really scared. My cover story I told Mama Dear about the bruises was that I finally got to play football with the other boys that day, and it just got a bit rough. She seemed to accept it, but after seeing all my cousins grow up, and being a nurse, I think she was just too kind to tell me she knew what really happened.

Love you very much. And don't worry about not being there when I woke up. I know you would if you could. Oh, and my 14th birthday is today also. If you could have been there that it would be great. But it's totally ok and I understand, because I know that you are in the hospital too. Only it's a different kind of hospital for different kind of help. You never sleep hardly, you have been hearing voices through the tv telling you "secrets" about people around you, and you claimed Cheyenne's dad was not Ray, but actually some local radio DJ that you had met on his Army leave? Yelling, cursing, just, it's all too much . . . You need rest and medical attention, and have some problems that our love just can't fix . . . However, once they actually admitted you into the clinic, you were on your best behavior. Because of this, and your refusal to take medication, the clinic could only hold you for a seventy-two-hour observation period. One nurse told me that if you didn't 'wig out' in front of them, this was the best their facility could offer. I can't wait to welcome you home tomorrow.

Now although you screamed to the heavens that everyone was against you, that's just not the case Mama. The vote to have you committed was a lot closer than you would have ever imagined. In fact, I'm fairly certain that more people than not were against you being sent, including Olivia and her kids, June Bug, and perhaps Lynell. I followed the lead of Mama Dear (as always) along with Janet and Rosalind, and did not object. But the concerns of the rest of the family had me pretty worried. They said they did not know what might happen to you, that this was wrong, and nobody's freedom should be taken away from them. And I'll be honest, I was really scared due to the portrayal of mental institutions in films and television. For all I knew they would have you locked up on the same wing as some psychopath or deranged killer . . .

I was mainly terrified at the potential for abuse and mistreatment at the hands of the clinic's staff. For one, I thought it was more like a jail scenario, with all degrees of the mentally ill lumped together. And two, I had not too long ago caught the Frances Farmer movie about her life and was horrified at how she was treated. However, when I visited you yesterday, I was relieved to see it was not like that all. The hospital was clean and well furnished. Although I arrived with people you consider "conspirators", you still spoke to me and no one else. During our talk you kept moving around, and only later did Rosalind point out that it was due to a nurse shadowing you to see how you interacted with your family. You didn't want to talk too long, and I get it. And again, I'm sorry. We just all want you to feel better. But I'm not all the way sure I will be there to see that. I tried to kill myself this morning before my surgery. There was no tear-riddled notes, no haunting/cryptic phone calls to family members either. So how did it get to that point, you ask? I had just come back from the pre-surgery doctor's appointment. We fought about something as well, I think you threw out a classic, "Maybe you should've just never been born" line, so that didn't really help move the conversation forward. . . And I was complaining about not wanting to go to school after the appointment, and argued I should stay home due to how the kids there treat me. And you said, "That's what happens to people that don't stand up for themselves."

Mostly, I just decided that it was time. Time to put an end to the string of misfortune others would merely describe as 'growing pains.' Time to quit facing the stares, the taunts. Time to stop letting others make me feel bad for something that I had no control over. Just as they had no input over whether they grew up to be tall, good looking, rich, or what have you. The only argument against not going through with it would be that it would have made Mama Dear sad. But that was no longer enough . . .

I was extremely curious over what would have happened. For instance, where would I go? Now, one would naturally think heaven, right? Seeing as how I had not done anything unbelievably wrong up to this point of my life. And though I vaguely recalled hearing that Catholics could not get into heaven if they committed suicide, I figured this wouldn't apply to me since I hardly ever went to church anyway. I was basically playing the odds. I mean, what were the chances of the afterlife being as crummy as the present life? Of course, I'd miss Mama Dear, but since she always wanted the best for me, I was sure she'd come to understand my actions. And, I was really banking on seeing her up there one day. Me and Granny up in heaven, watching soap operas during the day, while I hooped with the angels at night. Everyone else? Well, I'd see them as soon as they got there. If they ever got there . . . The way I saw it, if you saw someone you knew, then you'd recognize them through their spirit, if you will. And you'd remember all the good times you'd had together, and so on. However, if you did not see a person you knew from your past, you'd never miss them. How could you? There would be too much heavenly joy popping off all around you.

*The house was unusually empty, and I decided to seize the day. I took one of your many pistols, this one being an old 38 special you had taken from Mama's house (and blamed me for, no less), and I locked myself in my room. I turned on my record player, put on the only record I had, George Michael's "One More Try", and sat on the edge of the bed, waited for the last verse to end, put the gun to my temple, and pulled the trigger. What happened? Why am I still here? Well, it just clicked—without the Boom. I was like *hmm, what a buzzkill* (pun absolutely intended). I figured out how to open the chamber, and I looked inside. Six chambers, four bullets, and I got one of the empty two. What are the odds? Well of course the odds are 33 percent that I would luck up, but I mean, the cosmic odds? And even though I knew my chances of success went up prodigiously with each successive pull of the trigger, I kind of felt the moment had passed, and I decided to leave well enough alone, and went to watch He-Man. I mean, priorities, right? I promised myself that there would be no more attempts (yeah probably a lie). You know, there are just some things in this world that you can never get past . . . Instances that forever mark you—on the inside or out—that are inescapable. No matter how far you run, no matter how loud you scream. We learned about an author in English class, Primo Levi, who was a Holocaust survivor. He survived the horrors, and eventually became a big-time writer and chemist. Yet even after all of this, he chose to end his own life, forty plus years after being liberated from Auschwitz. But it seems as if he only gained freedom in name only, because his mind and his soul were still being tortured all those decades later.*

My classmates were shocked: "Why? How could he, especially after surviving that tragedy?" Well, I wasn't puzzled at all. The short answer is that he never in fact 'survived' that tragedy to begin with. We don't surrender our experiences once we are out of the moment. Or somehow magically transcend the pain. He merely sidestepped and bided time until an inevitable dark end he'd be holding off for far too long. Forged a great career, had a wife and children, but the internal horror remained . . . If someone went through the same thing, became a junkie, and then killed themselves, would there be a ton of questions surrounding him? In this author's case, the pain took the roundabout way, yet still caught up with him in the end.

Still looking for my place in the sun . . .

- Manny

P.S.

Thank you for this journal very much. Sorry for the long letter. I just really like writing in it, and hope you read it someday. It's one of the best presents I have ever gotten and I really appreciate it.



June 16, 1993

I went to the doctor and he decided I was able to return back to school. I also started my injections last week. It has been crazy to say the least. The same kids who used to avoid me like the plague were now all up under me, asking about my surgery, being on television, and things of that nature. My head is filled with silicone twice a week, and these

injections aren't that painful, all in all. They would best be described as vaccine shots in your head instead of your arm. However, the first few hours afterwards were tough due to headaches. This would have to be from the extra weight and tension on my head from the fluid building up over time while the skin was being stretched farther and farther. Not avoidable though, because they need more skin to then cut and sew over my burned skin. Like something out of a science fiction movie. At school, to hide the bumps from sticking out in my head, I wear a two-tone brown and white ski cap. Keep in mind this is during the spring/summer Texas heat and humidity, and will go on for two straight months. I get plenty of stares for my fashion choices—even from you. But from a guy who's used to stares, it's really no big deal.

- Manny