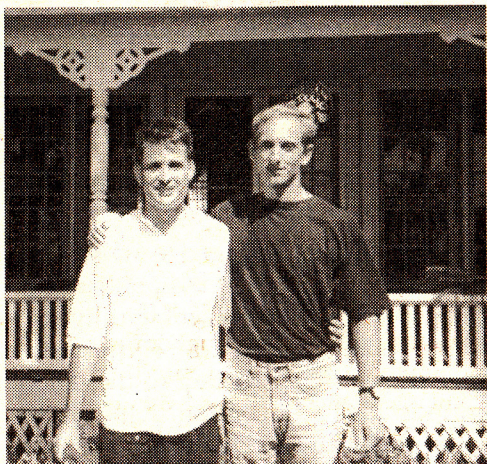


Loving Jeffry: a tribute



BY TOM WILCZAK

It was while Jeffry was studying music on a piano scholarship at Wayne State University that he first entered my life. He was attractive, bright, charming, gentle and held life in awe. He delighted and touched my soul from our very first meeting. Learning to play new popular music on the piano to court me, he reached me in a way no one had ever done before. From our very first date on May 25, 1983, my life was enlivened and enriched by his presence.

Jeffry Florian Kucharski and I grew to know and understand each other in a way that transcended the physical. In those places eternal that can only be reached by the mind and the heart, we touched each other, stroking and soothing those yearnings in each others' souls and spirits. Jeffry became my blooming flower, my warmth, my ardent supporter, my beam of light, my rainbow, my song and my silent peace.

And I his. Shortly before he died, he wrote to me that I was his sunrise and his sunset, his wind, his moon and his stars.

By touching each others' eternity, we explored the cycle of life together. During the final year of his life, we witnessed together the birth of his brother Jason's son, Lucas; we deeply pondered and discussed the purpose of life and suffering; we questioned the existence, and ultimately, the nature of God; and we were together at the moment of his death and his birth back into the spiritual world. I was honored to have been present to help to ease his crossing and his letting go of this world. I longed then to cross over with him, and continue our journey together. I know he will be there on the other side to welcome me home and help me readjust to the spiritual world. We are blessed to have found each other.

Loving Jeffry was easy. Touching each other so deeply and knowing each other so nakedly, however, often was painful. It made me confront some of my own deepest fears: fears regarding age (we had a ten year difference), my own shortcomings and weaknesses, my fears of losing him, and my adequacy as a mate and a lover - issues of self we all try to avoid rather than face. We often brought tears to each other from pain and anger, but more often from passion, joy and just pure being.

We had twelve and one half years from the day of our first date until the day Jeffry died, on October 25, 1995 at 9:10 p.m. We had many wonderful moments of learning to appreciate, honor, respect, forgive, grow and love each other more fully. The hardest lesson was learning to let go.

Letting go for us was a lengthy process; we often were not even aware of it at the time. It began six years ago when we dis-

covered Jeffry had HIV infection, just before he began law school, and it lasted until just moments before his death when we both finally truly accepted the parting. The process became increasingly more difficult during the final year, arduous in the last six months, and excruciating following his hospitalization in July and August. We had to learn to let go of so many things: our future, trips together to explore places like Greece, Italy and Russia, visit with our friends and families, going to movies, our nightly walks, meals together and finally even being able to move about the house with one another.

During those final months, Jeffry made peace with himself, the universe and his understanding of the eternal Divine. He learned to relinquish his physical body and planned for the time when he would "see the face of God." I, in turn, learned to release my desperate hold on his physical being, my fierce clinging to keep him alive with me no matter how physically incapacitated he had become, because his mind was crisp and sharp, because he was still Jeffry.

Looking back, I realize it took me a long time to see how I was failing to honor his dying due both to my fear of "losing him" and our fear of death. But we were learning lessons together that strengthened our souls and spirits. At the very end, I gave him permission to go and gently talked to him of my prayers that his angel, his deceased relatives and our deceased friends would greet him when he crossed over.

In turn, Jeffry gave me many precious gifts. Together we discussed some of the experiences he was having and the beings he was seeing as the doorway began to slowly open over the last couple of days while Jeffry crossed over and back. At the



final moment, Jeffry granted me an incredible gift by allowing me to feel his spirit pass through me on its way back home. With a final salutation of Namaste', Jeffry let go and the eternal essence of his being passed out of his body and through the eternal core of my being, confirming for us that we all are one when we are in our eternal souls.

I also learned much from him about strength, dignity, bravery and quiet courage. While pneumocystis pneumonia and cryptosporidium ravaged his body, Jeffry fought back with a strength that transcended the physical. I often watched with awe, pride, amazement and fear as he struggled to make his way to work at Affirmations and later as he struggled on wobbly legs to make it from our bed to the bathroom and back. I bore sole witness to his incredible courage and bravery as Jeffry refused pain medicine in his final hours, despite tremendous pain with every breath and with every touch of his skin against the bedding. He wanted to remain clear and focused at the moment he left this world. At that final moment, he smiled broadly with light in his eyes and soared up and out, onto the next stage of his journey.

No matter where else life takes me, I always will have Jeffry in my soul. I will catch up with you again. I will recognize you by your gentleness, your incredible wonder and awe of life, your inner music and song, your sense of justice and order, your gracious elegance, and your unending ability to give of yourself.