

November 3, 1982

Dear Ali,

I told you several times while in Egypt that I was very bad at writing letters. I only get around to writing Edward, my best friend in life really, about three or four times a year. That does not mean that I don't think of Edward almost every day.

I have been slow to write for several reasons. I work almost every day and this year my business is much better and more demanding than in the past because the person who used to run my business for me almost singlehandedly quit last December and I have had to spend much more time in the shop since only I know everything about lamp parts, prices on things, how to make certain repairs, etc.

In fact, today is only my second day off in a month or so. I am able to leave early, etc. during the week but I just find that it takes a great deal of energy to sit down and write a letter. You have to be in the mental frame of mind to do so and I have no energy left at the end of the day.

I was particularly thrilled to receive your letter last June with the very nice photo of you sitting ~~at~~ by the Henry Miller book. It was a nice letter---the kind I like--not so flowery that it is unrealistic.

Likewise, I am still a bit embarrassed over the terrible letter I wrote to you after a number of people filled me with all sorts of worries about bringing you over here. I wrote the "worst case" description of everything in that letter regarding what I thought you might face figuring that if I made staying with me and working in the shop, etc, for spending money sound so awful that after you got here you'd be thrilled to find out that I was not so demanding, possessive and the work was not as bad as I had described it.

Please just destroy that letter and forget everything in it.

You will probably find it hard to believe but I think of you still nearly every day for a number of reasons you will not exactly understand. It is not because our one night together was so erotic, it really wasn't as you recall--more an exercise in frustration. No, my thinking of you has more to do with social conditions, my past political involvements in this country, ~~xxxx~~ and the current state of world affairs.

First off, I've always been an idealist and used to be a very active one. I was the first person to ~~be~~ go on radio and television in the USA speaking up for gay people. I spent ten years of my life trying to educate the public and improve the living conditions of people like myself. I made public speeches at Universities, in churches, etc. I organized demonstrations, etc., until about the age of 25 or 26 I saw that I was dedicating my life to the betterment of other people who really didn't seem to be willing to do their share.

It was then that I decided, while reasearching a book on the subject of "Money" that I didn't want to endlessly sacrifice myself to abstract goals that I believed in but wanted to make concrete advances in life for myself and to enjoy the kind of lifestyle that I aspired to.

Ironically, I started my first business in 1966-67, selling buttons which generally supported social goals and ideals that I believed in. It was a success and I made a good deal of money in 1967-1970 being the "button king" of the United States and supplying groups like those opposed to the Vietnam War with slogan buttons--~~xxxxxx~~ This combined with my previous idealistic lifestyle and made me self-employed and enabled me to enjoy life and have material things.

But that wasn't really that satisfying for me and after selling my first business I returned to atype of idealistic life--writing. For over a year I worked as a reporter for one of the gay papers that had started here. But, like my other organization activities, I found that there were few financial rewards in that line of endeavor and finally I opened my antique shop qith my then-lover (who now works as my new manager at the store) and that eventually evolved into a lamp shop.

I don't know why I am outlining all this personal history. It is just that as I have grown older I find my idealism still troubles me and I dislike just working for a living at an ordinary job and making an ordinary (or slightly better than ordinary) income from it.

Since I have given up dedicating a lot of my time to political and social reform activities I have paid what I feel to be "conscience money" instead, devoting a part of my income to give as donations to things I decide are worthwhile. This gives me the feeling that I am doing something worthwhile in life.

I give so many donations to groups dedicated to everything from equal rights for women, to saving the whales, to prison reform, to policial action committee seeking to elect enlightened politicians to public office, to groups like a telephone answering service called the gay switchboard which maintains an information service and free counseling service to people who have questions about their life, etc, that every day my mailbox is just filled with more requests for donations. These groups pass around lists of their contirbutors and I get on all the lists in the end. I couldn't give to everything so I make and choose my donations since I really don't have that much disposable income.

The reason that I think of you so frequently is because I remember you as a sensitive, intelligent attractive person trapped in a situation which bothers me immensely. Every day I see thousands of young men like yourself taking their lives for granted--people who have a community of people like themselves to live among, people who have clubs & bars & discos where they can go with a friend and be themselves or meet other people. And when I do see them, I often think of you walking the streets of Cairo with only a few "ffriends" who share your tastes in life, with no organized social life, no discos to go to, no press that gives you news of interest to you, no real freedom to be yourself without risking physical abuse from the society at large. Yes, I think of you there and it makes me sad.

And when I trapped myself financially two summers ago by investing in silver and then having no funds whatsoever to use in bringing you here ...along with the cold and calculating letter I composed which I think gave you a terribly bad and negative picture of me...I regretted it.

And like the naive religionists (of which you are no doubt one as is 99% of the rest of humanity - I am one of these lonely and rare militant atheists) when my investments tumbled and I was showing paper losses amounting to far more than I would have spend bringing you over here, I felt that "fate" was somehow punishing me for being selfish and holding back on my better more idealistic impulses.

I think of you particuarly when I go to flea markets in the summer, These are great gatherings of people out in the countryside selling second-hand items- dishes, clothing, lamps, furniture, etc. I recall how limited your wardrobe was and how you could get so much for so little if only you had come and were there.

I think of you when I drive to my Mother's house up in Penna. on a lake---how the lush, green countryside whuld be such a treat to you. How I would so much enjoy seeing you going through the trills of seeing such land for the first time.

No Ali, I am a terrible writer but I think of you - no lie- at least once or twice a day. Perhaps it is vanity in a way. To know how lucky I am to be an American and to have so much while the world has so little. And to see the selfishness of most Americans and the smallness of most political leaders. I think of all the abstractions I have embraced in my life, of all the money I have given to groups trying to better everything from the purity of the water and the life in the oceans to changing political and social programs, and then I think of the few really concrete things I have been able to do in life.

I have been able to give a couple people close to me the opportunity to earn a good living. That makes me feel good. That to me is real results. Every now and then, someone calls me up to come and talk to a group about the "old days" in the fifties and sixties when I was one of the few people around working for the civil rights of us gay people. That, too, makes me feel good. I find that having a concrete effect on someone or something gives me greater satisfacation than ~~just~~ just making money or getting my name in the newspapers or my face on television.

That is really why I wanted to bring you here and that is why I still harbour those desires. I want to be someone who touches another's life and makes it such that that life can never be the same again. It's the idealist in me that refuses to die. That is why I shudder when I think of the ugly "contract" I outlined in my letter to you some time ago.

It was this knowing ache that I had missed such an opportunity that motivated me today. I have always had a type of "hero's" fantasy in my life--that I would somehow be able to do some small thing which was undeniably worthwhile, like some of those individuals who saved individual Jews from the gas chamber during the Second World War. They did a small thing, a small good thing, in the face of a terrible injustice that they were unable to control or stop.

We Americans give thanks for the freedom we have and the blessing we enjoy. We don't exchange gifts here on Thanksgiving ~~it~~ it seemed the right thing to celebrate since, as an atheist, I can't take the usual or orthodox religious holidays too seriously.

Which is another reason why I often think of you. Every time I see the flames of war licking at the Middle East, I think of you and the many individual people I met in Egypt who I liked. Politically I am very opposed to what Isreal has been doing. I see the whole situation there in the middle east as one in which multiple wrongs by groups of people to one another have made a hopeless mess of everything. I would be sickened to see peace collapse and the Egyptian army rush off to another war -however justified - with Isreal, Libya or anyone else. I think of people like yourself and other friends of mine who are Jewish and wonder why people have to be religious fanatics, why people have to be involved in arguments that are thousands of years old, why people have to take others land, kill other people, make war on one another. And I get sick and tired of seeing my country so frequently on the wrong side in everything--Central America, the Phillipines, the Middle East, etc. I was very fond of Sadat and greatly saddened at his death. As you may know, Jimmy Carter in his memoirs spoke very highly of him and pictured Begin as ~~xxxxxxx~~ the slimy little fanatic (religious fanatic) that he is. I have been very relieved to see that the new president in Egypt seems to be a reasonable man who has followed in Sadat's footsteps.

The war in Lebanon particularly upset me. I thought it was horrible what Isreal did. I think that most of what Isreal does is pretty terrible and fortunately, Egypt has been very reasonable in its response to all this--no doubt because of the great amount of financial aid the USA sends there.

In any event, I seem to be wandering...I had decided that instead of making a contribution to one of the political action committees here in the USA that I would send you a little gift instead. I decided this last June & kept putting off the writing of the letter until I got around to finding out how to do it. It wasn't until about the time you were writing to me that I finally got around to going across town to Citibank and making the deposit in your name to be cabled to Cairo where you are supposed to be informed by the National Bank of Egypt via mail that the money has arrived. I send \$100 USA. I have just been looking for my receipt to give you the numbers on it etc but they told me that they rarely lose anything & if you didn't get it in a couple weeks, to come in and they would put a tracer on it. I assume you did not get it yet since you didn't mention it in your letter...or did you get it and that triggered the letter? I have the file number around here somewhere so if you haven't gotten it by the time you get this letter, let me know and I will put a tracer on it. I don't exactly trust the efficiency of banks, etc. to handle such things since Edward & I both have had trouble transferring funds. But the \$100 USA was deposited at Citibank in NYC to be given to you from their correspondent bank, the National Bank of Egypt. You could have gotten it at Citibank if you had an account there but I doubted that you had a bank account.

In any event, first I was going to write and tell you to consider it a gift for the Moslem gift-giving holiday which ended a few weeks ago. Then I thought of ~~xxxx~~ Christmas but that was too far in advance. Finally I decided to tell you to consider it a "Thanksgiving Day" gift-- the day we Americans give thanks for the freedom we have and the material blessings we enjoy. We don't exchange gifts here on Thanksgiving but it seemed the right thing to celebrate since, as an atheist, I can't take the Moslem or Christian religious holidays too seriously.

I can understand why you were chosen as a candidate for administrator. You are a charming and intelligent person. You might have made the right choice in not going further with your studies in that area. I believe in education but what you should get is technical education--learn accounting, typing (which you said you were taking) computers, anything except the arts. I have a bachelor of arts degree and it never did me much good in getting a practical job. I only ~~wish~~ wish I had had some business administration courses in college, some accounting courses---or had majored in engineering or in pharmacy or something practical. Literature and the arts are rewarding to the intellect but practically the only thing you can do with those degrees is teach or something. Of course, if you want to be a wealthy person in the USA, you simply buckle down and study hard and become a medical doctor.

I can see your reasons for not wanting to be tied down with the ministry of education. I would not want that type of job either. I am a loner, a unique person. I have always wanted to be self-employed. Perhaps that is because, unlike yourself, I have always been somewhat unpopular with a lot of people. I wouldn't get too far in any bureaucracy where my advancement depended on others. I want to be master of my own life. ^{but} that is very difficult to do and I am one of the few Americans who have succeeded in doing it. Only about one in ten people in this country are self-employed like I am.

Working in private schools is probably much better anyway. You will meet a better class of people and one thing I've learned in life is that meeting the right people is very important. They can get you other jobs, give you leads on opportunities, etc. etc.

I suppose that it is impossible for you to leave the country before your military service is complete. Is it? Would you be able to come to the United States for 2-4 weeks this winter if I paid the ticket...say during late January and early February? I think I would be willing to do so if you were free to travel.

I would almost commit myself to bring you over ~~in April~~ in April June 84, but ~~if~~ I do not give my word and then not keep it. At the moment, I have the funds and would be willing to pay your way. I sold the silver I bought (at a small loss) and am in a good financial position. I can't get away (I don't think) to travel this year again since my ex-lover is not very good at running the shop all by himself and last time I went away for six weeks all sorts of money was lost through mismanagement, etc...but I might try anyway as I will explain later.

In any event, you can count on me for help in signing papers here etc whenever you need it if that is necessary. Even if I don't have the money at the time, I will guarantee your support, etc. to make it easier for you to come here. I am delighted that you are working for an American company since that might enable you to come up with a better reason for coming here. ^{Asking} asking me might raise questions regarding our relationship, etc. while if you had other contacts, still worked for an American Company and wanted to come to see their headquarters, (or something like that) it would make things seem more legitimate. If you do have a job, or even if you don't, I would be willing to pay your way on a "loan basis" anyway---with the eventual idea of you repaying me. But I have a rule of never lending money that I would really have to get back so repayment isn't the bottom line in my mind.

I am very happy to hear you talking the way you are talking because the one thing I wanted to do for you was to show you the options you have in life. I knew that once having seen life as it is here in the USA and other countries, your greatest desire in life will be to get out of Egypt and life elsewhere.

Do not be discouraged. You have the intelligence, the work ethic, add most of all, the desire to make something of your life. You may end up in Australia or somewhere but I am sure that if you work hard and are determined, you will escape from the poverty and misery of life in Egypt.

I would be very ~~xxxx~~ happy to have you ppp up in my life again. Life for me is good but not without its sadder moments. If I told you everything, you would never understand. And I have a very stange household here and a very strange lifestyle. Even my friends find it strange.

My ex-lover who started working in my shop this last June is making enough under profit-sharing to move out into another place. We just don't get along any more. Since last ~~xxxxxxx~~ January I have taken in two people to live with me. One of them is an 18 year old burlesque dancer from a broken ~~xxxx~~ home who survives by working as a prostitute. He has few options in life since he can't read nor write but is a wonderful cook, a fabulously funny and wonderful person to have around and really takes care of the house. We are not sexually involved although everyone things I'm having a big thing with this hot sex object. He does all the cooking and decorating, etc, around the house. This has caused me to gain a few pounds of weight.

He brought in the second person, a 37 year old black feminine queen who get's a disability check from the government and who has worked as a street transvestite prostitute since 1963. Now he has given it up. He does all the dishes, house cleaning, etc. & with the money he gets from the government and the "tips" we give him for doing things---like today he did the laundry, picked up the dog's room and is cooking a dinner for two of my friends --lovers who have been together for years and own their own house in the suburbs--~~xxx~~. He is an institution in the Village a very nice and intelligent person and having the two of them here makes it unnecessary for me ever to do housework, cook, clean, whatever. I am just too busy and my time is better spend doing work at my shop. I don't have any sexual relationship with either of them. They are like adopted "children" (my ex-lover calls them my "children") and I am never lonely. I hate living alone and since my last two affairs have been so difficult, I find this is a way to have companionship and friendship without all the conflicts and agony of a love-affair. They both chip in \$50 weekly for ~~xxxxxxx~~ rent and food which covers the food they eat at least and maybe more. Having them here has made my life much easier and happier. Now the younger one, Willie is starting to study books and is slowly learning to read a little English and is going to start going to night school since he realizes that what he does, while it makes him good money at the moment, (when he dances at the theater in midtown and takes old men into the back room, he can clear one thousand dollars in one week) he knows that there is no future in it and doesn't like doing what he has to do to earn a living. I want to help him get on his feet. If I ever had a son, I couldn't have asked for a finer boy than he is. And the fact we don't have sex makes our relationship less complicated.

I hesitate to tell you some of these things since you will probably get a bad impression of me (again?). But life here is strange in certain ways. I know I am no beauty and don't have that strong of a sex drive. I have grown tired of the mery-go-round of bars and the like. I find that what I need most in life is friendship, not romance-- although I certainly like romance as much as anyone. I have a lot of intellectual interests and not nearly enough time for my business.

So, I have fallen into a kind of trap. I have supported my ex-lover now for ten years. I cannot turn him out. We don't get along but he was the one who first got me into the antique shop. He has tried going off on his own but every time, he gets a dead-end job in which he makes little or his business venture fails and he comes back. Now he is working as manager in my shop and just moved out a few days ago for the third or fourth time. He has other people he dates and we no longer are sexually involved.

For the three years before last December, I had someone in my shop who had a most peculiar persuasion but with whom I did have a regular sexual relationship--on every Monday night at 7:00 p.m. It was very nice to have something constant in my life but I cared too much for him and he got to the point that he couldn't stand me although I was enabling him to make 13 thousand dollars a year with only a 7th grade education. So, he quit. After a few other jobs, he is now working for a big lamp company making one-half of what he made working for me. And ~~HE~~ he has also found a lover at ~~the~~ last who shares his special peculiar sexual tastes and seems to be happier than he's been in a long time. But he is always in need of money and we have always had a half-affair so we still see each other twice a week and he has sex with me and I give him spending money. He's 25 now. I first started seeing him when he was only 16.

So, I have become corrupted in that most of my relationships in life have what I call an economic basis. I don't necessarily prefer it that way but the relationships that have that basis do seem to last longer. My ex-lover still is around after ten years and so is my ex-manager after nine years...I know that if I didn't have the store and jobs and money---just like if I didn't have a beautiful comfortable apartment on the river here in Hoboken--no one would be around. I don't consider this ugly, I consider it realistic. My ex-lover, my ex-manager and my two roommates all genuinely like me in a certain way which is not based on omney...but the economic basis in the relationship is what makes them last and makes them stable. Also, it is what gives me leverage in situations. It is my ~~part~~ apartment and my store and I like it that way.

I only tell you these things hoping you will understand why I am paranoid and defensive in certain ways and perhaps this will enable you to forgive my terrible letter of a couple years ago. I also suspect that you will understand since you mentioned your relationship with your teacher and boss.

Edward has given up drinking (for the one hundredth time) and is flying to India this Nov. 12th to meet a friend of his here from Canada--a fifty year old divorced woman whom he is quite fond of and whom he often talks of in terms of possible marriage. Edward, as you know, is a religionist and is very hostile to my atheism. His friend is going to study under some guru in an ashram and I am convinced that they are both going to become some sort of religious fanatics in India before it is all over. Edward has been traveling in Jordan, and Turkey most of the summer--visiting the parts he and I didn't get to. He also spends some time in Greece. He says that I am not invited to India since his woman friend and I would be too much for him to handle at once. Actually, I have written him a letter begging him for an invitation. If it comes, I doubt that I will be able to go. But with the chances being about one in three, if I do go and it is possible for me to stop over in Cairo for a few days, perhaps we can see each other this winter.

Edward has friends in dozens of countries around the world who write letters to him. He has the opposite problem I have. Most people like him and try to seek him out and offer their friendship but he is unable to respond for some reason. I seek people out and the run the other way (ha)--Edward once wrote to me that "You want to be loved but you are not loveable." but since he has said that that is not so. In fact, I got a long letter from him asking why I never showed any sexual interest while we were traveling together, that he was actually waiting for me to express an interest and that we could have had a lively trip together if I had. Well, I was so mad at him and his nasty drinking so much of the time, it never really entered my mind although we did have a sexual relationship for several years while in college together back in the 1950's and into the early 60's.

Edward's money will eventually run out and then I hope he will come to his senses. I have offered to help publish his books if he will write some. He is probably the most important person, intellectually speaking, in my entire life.

My friend Terry Sepiro has moved from Riyadh (spelling?) His new address is: Damman Language Institute, P.O. Box 6957, Damman, Saudi Arabia. You might try writing to him there. Please understand that you would not possibly be of interest to him sexually, you are much, much, too old but I have harangued him about what a fabulous person you are and he might be open to some overture regarding meeting when he comes to Cairo--especially if you could arrange a place where he could have privacy with his little friends. Things are very repressed in Saudi Arabia and he is very closeted so I don't know what your chances would be but it is worth a try. Terry wanted me to go to Costa Rica with him last year...he took an around-the-world trip, stopping at the Phillipines on the way back to Saudi Arabia...wish I had so much money. He is one of the very few foreigners to rise to the management level in business in Saudi Arabia. He gets most of his English teachers from England but they just opened this second school and if he met you I think there would be a chance he could help you get employment in Saudi Arabia and make decent money. Any way it is worth a try.

Well, that is all for now. I hope that by the time you get this, the money I sent you has arrived. I thought you would need it, not knowing you were finished school. Enjoy it. Put some aside for those lean times in the army when you will have so little money. If I pay for your ticket, I'll expect you to at least have the money to get to the airport, etc, (ha).

Like I said, I've always desperately wanted to go to India and if Edward invites me, I hope to be able to get away this winter. I have had no vacation since I last saw you. If that happens, I will do my best to arrange a stopover in Egypt for a few days if at all possible and will certainly give you notice about it at that time.

In the meantime, I hope this long, long letter has made up my not writing. I told you before and I'll tell you again, since I used to write for a living---and in fact I have magazines and newspapers that want me to do articles for them now and I just haven't found the time,--- and since I am so busy, I just don't get around to writing like I want to. Do you have a work phone number in Cairo?

But I do think of you and would love some other photos of you. I so regret that I didn't take any movies of you that day down by the Nile. My films on Egypt just don't seem complete.

If you come here, you're ~~now~~ going to have the time of your life. Of course, I hope you have some time left for me after all the excitement and discoveries of this new world will offer you. If I continue to do well, I am 60% certain that I would be willing to bring you over here in 1984. I am 100% certain I'd pay your way this winter.

I only hold back because I don't want to overcommit myself. If I go to India, I may meet someone there that I want to bring to America also. I want to work some magic in some people's lives before I die and this seems to be one way of doing it....

So, happy Thanksgiving! May you find the freedom and success you seek. You are very much in my thoughts and I feel now that we will someday see each other again.

as always,
your friend,