

During the last Equinox, on March 21, 1999, family and friends gathered to mourn the loss of Terence Freitas. The service was held at Terry's old school, Highland Hall, in Northridge, California. When it was her turn to speak, Abby read the following piece to a rapt and tearful audience.

MERCY

Mercy is my new friend. I can scarcely remember another time in my life during which mercy has been a central figure. Today, it is getting me through.

Mercifully, I cannot yet comprehend that this atrocity is what I am really writing about right now, that this violation has really happened to my baby. Mercifully, I have been sheltered successfully from the media. Mercifully, Terence and I were at the beginning of love. Our new apartment in Brooklyn is full of his stuff, but not memories. It is full of the anticipation of sharing a life together, but not the evidence or leftovers. Mercifully, Terence came to me often during the week of the abduction, letting me know, even when the violence inflicted upon them I felt, that he was okay. Mercifully, he let me know very clearly that he was out of that body before the bullets hit. And that he was fine. Mercifully, I can sleep at night and wake up in the morning.

I met Terence last year in Oakland. I went to his office to get advice about how to handle another case of Shell - Occidental exploration on indigenous ancestral domain in the Philippines where I had been working.

Terry's hands fit my hands like every muscle in each had been shaped over the last twenty years to prepare for meeting that clasp. The last minute I spent with him was on 9th Ave and 34th, hailing a cab to take him to JFK.

We didn't say anything, kissed. He put his hand on the window, bye.

I received a letter from Terry on March 6 postmarked early February from Bogota. The letter was full of promise and hope. I can tell you, Terence was at a turning point. He had reached the point of acceptance and gentleness with himself required for actualizing the true inner changes he wanted to make. He was hopeful and he was in love.

During the week of the abduction there was a tight group of family members and representatives from

all three families working together for their release out of the American Indian Community House in Manhattan. I had the honor of representing the Freitas family there. Julie and Peter entrusted Leslie Wirpsa, Steve Tribbeck, and myself - Terry's closest allies - to work with this larger team working for their release.

The week moved simultaneously in fast forward and super slow motion. The import of every decision and intensity of emotion demanded that each of us stay exactly in the present moment, fiercely attentive to both nuanced gut feelings and massive coordination.

By Thursday of that week we had begun to establish systems for decision making and communication with the larger community of concerned friends and organizations. Our family phone conferences streamlined into a series of update faxes and reminders about how family members should handle media, the FBI, the US consulate in Bogota, et cetera. We were preparing for the long haul typical of similar past abductions in Colombia. By Thursday afternoon we were sending an email directly to our best contact within FARC, with strong counsel, telling him about how much in solidarity Ingrid, Lahe, and Terence were with many of their organization's own populist principles.

Thursday afternoon an incongruous dread settled on the room in which we were working. Everyone was tense and operating in slow motion. Steve left to take a break. Ingrid's husband and I embraced each other and wept. At the same time here on the west coast, Jenny and Julie said they found themselves weeping at the hairdressers. We pushed through the remaining day.

On each of Terence's trips to Colombia we had set a time, morning and night, at which to intentionally connect with each other, a time set for when either one of us was far from phone contact. That Thursday night the whole group at the American Indian Community House, with Lahe's husband on speaker phone from Connecticut, tuned into the three loved ones at 8 pm eastern, as Terry and I did every day.

There was quiet. We parted in silence.

The next morning early the spirit in the office was one of calm. We were efficiently pursuing every lead we had. We were opening up communication with the federal investigators in Bogota. We had even received word that the International Red Cross in Serevena had had contact with the captors. Family members were instructed to prepare letters to Terry, Ingrid, and Lahe for the IRC to take to them upon direct contact.

I was picking up the phone to call Julie about this instruction when we received the call from Ingrid's office that three bodies had been found across the Venezuelan border, one of which held two of Ingrid's credit cards. American Express had called Ingrid's office to verify her description. For a surreal half hour the office paused in disbelief. The initial report was of two male bodies and one woman. We thought this cannot be them. It doesn't match. It is three other people, Ingrid's credit cards on other bodies. I told the FBI agents in Bogota about the unconfirmed news. One of us then talked directly with the Venezuelan police. One woman with an eagle tattoo, the other with a triangle. And one young man, 25-30, with dark curly hair. It's them.

Sometime later that day, with Menominee drums wailing in the circle center of the Community House, two women pulled me aside, washed my hands with fresh sage, and took me to a table full of food. One woman handed me a plate and told me to prepare a meal for Terry's spirit. I did. I fed him big because he was hungry. Then she told me to eat. That I had to become again strong. That Terry would want me to

eat. I went and got two apples. One on Terry's plate. One in my hand.

It took me six hours to eat that apple. But I did. I knew as that woman said it the challenge I have ahead and exactly what that challenge will demand of me. I knew as she said it that the only way for me to go through this terror is to face it head on and with love. To accept it through defiance. This terror and its aftermath will not break me. I am to eat, to sleep, to train, to function through this all from a place of love. The bigger love of which Terry is now part, the love that as a current runs through each person here and each tree, bird, river running outside.

This interruption of life - the beautiful boy now dead, the life together we could have shared - has given me permission to live only in accordance with exactly that which will feed me more life. Given me permission to seek out the fire and to live it without compromise. Given me permission to demand the same of those who choose to be around me.

I am not talking about raging into a careless life of frenzied action. No. Precisely the opposite. These are the personal effects of globalization. When I say this terror and loss will not break me, I mean that I do not bow down to it. I will ask Mercy for the discipline to surrender only to the love that I fiercely continue to believe exists, even in a world where this can happen.

Terence, go peacefully, free bird. Your work is done. Mahal kita.

March 20, 1999
Los Angeles

WWC INTERACTIVE

Women Working for Change is taking its community on-line with two new list-serves.

Our discussion group is hosted at wwc-talk@egroups.com. Messages sent to this address will be sent out to all other list-serve subscribers. This discussion group will be used to foster a sense of community and to stimulate dialogue amongst WWC participants and mentors. It is a forum for uncensored, unabashed questioning of basic assumptions, pretenses, patterns, boundaries... and for on-going communication about our work, our concerns, our triumphs, our world, and our organization. Feel free to post relevant announcements, alerts, conferences, and updates that may be of interest to WWC participants. The list-serve is only open to subscribing WWC participants and mentors. To subscribe, please notify Jacinda at jacinda@alumni.stanford.org.

We will use the administrative list-serve, womenworkingforchange@egroups.com, only to notify you of meetings, teleconferences, and other WWC news and events.