

Penpal Nikki

The following is a collection of correspondences of a young woman in the North American continent in the Spring of 2015.

"A Letter always seemed to me like Immortality, for is it not the Mind alone, without corporeal friend?"

—Emily Dickinson

Hi,

Well, I've never had anyone ask me anything like this so I've not really thought too much about the subject before, but I'll try to give as thoughtful an answer as I can to your questions. My perspective is probably a little less usual as I elected to forego sex before marriage and I've maintained that, so my thoughts on sex are hypothetical but my thoughts on celibacy in adulthood are fairly well-formed.

I think life without love is meaningless. But I also think love is almost too small a word for all of the things we apply to it. To me, I have to reconcile that by considering "love" as the noble thing humans do - I think of it as our intent to do good.

With that, I don't see why lack of traditional intercourse would be an unconquerable issue in a marriage. I think it could be a stressor just the way money is often a stressor for couples - it's either a hurdle or it's a complete deal-breaker, depending on the couple and their bond and long-term goals. Personally, in actuality I don't know how I'd feel about it if the real prospect emerged. Who it was, how our relationship was, how it effected them emotionally - there are so many unknown variables that I'd feel too arrogant trying to say anything about how I would "definitely" handle it. But I know hypothetically that I don't think that's the foundation I plan to form a marriage on, and so I'd hope that that kind of a hurdle wouldn't impact my decision to commit to someone. I don't want to undermine its significance by saying it's not a big deal, but I guess it seems like such a manageable hurdle in comparison to addiction, unfaithfulness, abuse, or even things like loss of a child or major illness such as cancer. Lack of traditional sex or traditional pregnancy doesn't eliminate sex or having children anymore.

It certainly wouldn't stop me from dating them or getting to know them. What I want from a partner is someone who I think is a remarkable person and who I want to spend the rest of my life beside. I try not to put more caveats on it than that when I'm getting to know someone because I don't want to foolishly overlook that right person. I want to spend time with that person and enjoy that person's company more than anyone else's. I've had some kind of unique life experiences and I certainly have baggage. I know whoever I end up with will probably need to be similar in that way for us to even be able to relate in life outlooks, though I expect that their baggage and experiences will be totally different from mine. So I keep the perspective that I don't care where he's from, what he's done, or what he's been through. All I want to care about is who he is, so that's what I look for.

Hi Bo,

I do like to write! And you ask really interesting questions, so it's fun to discuss. Yeah, I personally don't have any baggage like those kinds of things, most of my baggage is emotional, just imperfections. But I consider them as significant as physical flaws in that they're something a future partner would have to deal with. I wish I were perfect because I find it much easier to accept the flaws in others than to ask them to accept mine, but I know that's part of the give-and-take.

Regarding virginity, for me it's a combination of the reasons you stated. I thought remaining celibate prior to getting married was a small thing to pledge to a God who wanted my *eternal soul*, so when I committed that, not having sex seemed like such a minor thing. But there's other layers too - personally I place a lot of importance on touch and so am very sparing with physical contact, so I know the impact of connecting with someone like that would really effect me and I couldn't do it casually. Further, it's hard to explain without sounding ridiculous or naive but, I've spent a long time looking for the man that I want to end up with. When I assess that the person that I'm with isn't him, I really don't want them touching me. I feel this sort of loyalty to this person even though we've probably never met and possibly never will.

I hadn't really thought about it, but I guess I think of marriage as an institution separately from how I think of what I would want for my own marriage. I think of "marriage" definitely as a societal title, a necessary set of cultural/familial roles. For that reason I kind of rejected it - I've tried to build my life around being wholly functional and self-sufficient so that I didn't need a family unit to support me. I didn't want to rely on a good husband to financially provide for me or completely emotionally sustain me, or even good children to fulfill me. I wanted to choose the people in my life to be there because I simply wanted them - not for what they could do for me. So for my own marriage I'd consider what I want to be something alive - that example you gave of being widowed is one I've thought about a lot as why I think that. I try not to "say never" but I can't picture getting remarried if I were widowed unless my previous spouse had explicitly asked me to. I can live independently just fine and I've always thought that I'd love one man with everything that I had and for the rest of my life. I think I'll only ever make that commitment once.

I'm not sure what breaks someone's spirit, I guess I think it must vary. It seems like feeling wanted is a crucial piece, but what makes a person feel wanted has to hinge on their insecurities. For me, relationships that sometimes required long physical absences never seemed overly difficult. But it's easy for me to say that because one of my larger insecurities is that someone will be uninterested in me mentally and emotionally but overlook that in favor of my physical attributes. Distance eliminates some of that and forces people to look at their personality compatibilities, and planes and the internet and cell phones make it so easy to connect, so I don't mind it. I'm sure for people who need more physical assurances to assuage their insecurities, it must be a major trial though.

It's funny that you mentioned happiness being broad and vague, because that's exactly what I want out of life and I completely agree. I've identified happiness as my life's pursuit but it's less like an action or state of being and more like dedication to figuring out what that means. I know I want to spend it doing things I find meaningful and valuable, and try to do as little harm as possible. Beyond that, I want to live a life that I haven't seen before - you know, not like a plot to a book or movie that I already know the ending to. I want to see new things and meet unique people. What about you?

I'm very conflicted about whether love is more inclusive and expansive or strict and individual. I believe it must be possible for someone to love more than one person, or to become lovers and then simply have the relationship "die" and be awkward exes. But at the same time, I personally can't fathom it. The way that I love is, maybe unfortunately, inherently biased. I have no focus or energy left to consider other men in that way when I'm with someone. But at the same time, I'd want whoever I was with to seek happiness more than anything else, so I wouldn't want my love to get in the way of that. I'd want them to be with whoever they wanted to be with, but I'd definitely want to remain friends. To lose a relationship that meaningful seems like such a tragedy.

- Nikki

Hi Bo,

Yes, I definitely have some perfectionist tendencies. I try to do the same as you described to address it, as so often it ends up being counterproductive when I know I'm just using it as a means to focus my mind and gain some semblance or even illusion of control in the face of too many uncontrollable factors.

Funny about the Five Love Languages, did you ever take the "assessment test" for those? I do think of touch as a major aspect, though I took the test as part of a school course and found it to be about middle of my list (quality time and acts of service were my top languages). I think the kind of limited touch, though - to me I see physical touch as maybe the most raw and crucial communication our senses allow us. I think it's the most difficult sense to try and convey a lie through. Not impossible of course, but it's such a channel between how you touch someone and your emotions. It's a major reason why I don't touch most people as much - when I do, I mean it to mean something, and I feel exposed by it. Doing it carelessly diminishes its value, to me.

I hadn't heard of skin hunger, that's very interesting! And yes, everything that you detailed is exactly what I meant (though you said much more gracefully). I don't fully understand it, but I've just always had this sort of unshakeable feeling that there would be someone I wanted to be beside, definitely a soulmate type. My resolve hasn't weakened and in fact it's gotten stronger because I haven't found someone who has roused that feeling. I think, if I believe that kind of love is possible, how selfish would I be to agree to a commitment that denies someone else that opportunity if I don't feel that way about them? If I'm wrong and it doesn't exist and I spend life alone, that would be sad, but really I wouldn't mind much. Just living with the hope that it exists is enough for me.

I completely agree about couples and their children. A lot of the couples that I know put their children first, then themselves, then their relationship with their significant other. I can't imagine loving someone fiercely and having them "rank" at all, let alone so far down.

You have a fascinating take on commitment! I had to really think about it, because honestly it's always something I've taken for granted and not ever thought much on. I've always thought of commitment as an intensely personal pledge. Something I was willing to kneel down to and recognize as a center I was willing to allow pieces of my world to spin around. It's why I've spent my life fairly commitment-averse - the only things I've committed to were God and the pursuit of happiness, and only even those two because I found them to be harmonious (or almost the same thing, really). The only commitments I considered beyond that were taking a husband and having children, and even with those I think of that commitment as a pledge of ideals to myself, not really the act of pledging to my spouse/etc.

But I think in some ways I misuse the word, and I believe I understand and agree with your theory. I think acts of commitment, like marriage, are somewhat trivial because to me they're just statements of intention. I mean, I hope to get married and think weddings are lovely, but it's more like a potential spec in this giant landscape of what romantic love is. I think love exists around it, it exists without it, and in fact if the marriage/commitment is touted as equal to or more important than love, I think it's doomed.

I can't imagine loving someone and demanding they remain with me despite their desires. I wouldn't want that. In fact, for example, when I was younger I thought I might be in love with someone, and that man wanted to leave me and be free to do things I thought were detrimental to him. I decided to accept it and let him go even though I knew how awful it would feel to lose him and how likely it was that he would be hurt. I cherished him and respected that it was his life, and I wanted my love to enhance that, not confine it or try to "own" him. I can't imagine feeling any differently about someone I was truly in love with.

Thank you! That's a lovely compliment and something I don't hear often, so I really appreciate it. I am not sure about my travel plans, but I at least hope to visit Japan next spring to see the cherry blossoms. I try to go overseas once a year and I haven't gone this year, so I was thinking of trying to visit Europe in the fall. Or South America - I've wanted to go to the Galapagos islands for a long time now. Do you like to travel?

I'm a Canon person, though I think Nikon's are terrific. Is photography a hobby of yours? I think electronic view finders/mirror-less may be the future, but for me I like the mirrors. Then again I'm such an amateur that my opinion isn't worth much. I've only started to try and learn more about photography, mostly because last year I took a challenge to try and take a picture a day for the year. I got much better at taking photos but I still have so much to learn.

- Nikki

Hi Bo,

I agree with your thoughts on photography. My favorite photos to take have come to be wildlife portraits because of that representation of a moment of connection - it's like a record of this creature, in this moment, at this place. I'm not sure why it's wildlife in particular for me, but it definitely feels like catching a glimpse of their soul. I guess it feels as if they're gracing me with the opportunity to show the world that they existed, that they were beautiful and that they mattered.

I have a T3i with just the standard lens and an EF-S 55-250mm lens. I think the camera's perfect for my level of experience/ability, but I hope to find a better lens for the wildlife shots soon. It's tough to get eagles or sea life with such limited zoom. What do you use?

I've never been to a Disney theme park, so that's really interesting to hear. That actually sounds like an ideal vacation, to totally unplug emotionally from regular life. I love to travel, though I do find it amazing how many travelers that I meet that have entirely different reasons for doing it. Ecclesiastes was always my favorite book of the Bible so I guess that probably impacted it, but I've never been very interested in explicit "discovery" travel. It always seemed selfish to me to demand that the world "fix" me by thrusting myself out into it in order to change my perceived flaws, or arrogant to "find new worlds" when of course, life exists before and after my presence. To me, traveling is getting the opportunity to better know the world that I get to briefly be a part of. It's like the world is this awesome, great thing and I get this rush of joy to simply be allowed to view it. I like your explanation of the physical differences and their impact - I find it fascinating to go to a new place for exactly this reason. It's so interesting how even smaller cities or towns feel like they have a physical pulse that's uniquely theirs due to the combination of those elements.

With touch, I tend to be almost unreasonably stubborn in my resolutions so I don't worry too much about weakening with regard to sex, but I do absolutely think touch's power is rooted more in the emotional pull than the physical sensation. I feel like I'm giving up a measure of control of the outcome when I introduce touch as an action much more than speaking, looking, etc, because I'm so much more honest (often unwillingly) with that kind of connection. I've never really considered how bizarre it is until now, but sharing a bed is usually one of the first things I do with men I date or am close to, typically long before we kiss or touch in other more traditional and less intimate ways. It's probably more animalistic than a conscious decision because I don't really know why I seem to do it so consistently, but I think it's a way to show that I trust them and want them near me even when I'm in such a vulnerable state. Objectively it's probably like jumping off a diving board head first and hoping there's a swimming pool below, but somehow it fits.

-Nikki

Hi Bo,

The Canon 5D Mark III is amazing, what a camera to start out with. What kind of things do you like to photograph most? The rare animals are what I most want to see in the Galapagos, though I've heard the scenery alone is just amazing because of the limited human impact on the environment. For Europe I'm thinking of going to Iceland (it's easy to get to from Seattle and I'd like to try and see the northern lights) or Greece if it's stable, but I may skip Europe this year and stay closer to home depending on the time of year I get to go.

I'm very glad that you understood what I was trying to say - what you described is exactly what I was attempting to touch on. It's an area that I rely almost completely on emotions for, and so it's difficult to try and put into words. Your example with the showers is great, and that's exactly how I feel with regard to establishing those kind of deep, intimate emotional connections. I'm envious of people who can be very measured and calculated with how they develop their relationships, because for me I just can't regulate my emotions that way. I'm either not invested at all or I deeply care about someone, thereby giving them a lot of ability to hurt me if they choose to, and there isn't a lot of in between.

It's hard to say how long I could withstand periods of separation, personally. I've lived with periods of separation from people I loved most of my life, so based on that and the importance I've placed on finding and sustaining that kind of a romantic connection with someone, the prospect of intermittent separation isn't very daunting. Things like military deployments and separations like that are things I've already considered or encountered, and I felt were no significant issue (stressful, but not unbearable). Faced with long periods of separation for the rest of my life, however, I would have a harder time with. More because I'm not used to feeling helpless, and having to commit to something painful like that forever with nothing that I could do, no matter how extreme, to change the situation would cause me to feel that way. An end date, even a decade or two down the road, has always been part of my previous experiences, so I don't know how I would feel if that weren't involved.

All that being said, if it were someone that I felt that kind of strong connection to, I can't imagine walking away from it or regretting it. I feel like I've been committed to finding someone like that for as long as I could remember, so in transferring that focus to the relationship with someone, I truly can't think that I would be shaken from it over external factors like that. I try to never say never because I know pain is easier to dismiss when you're not feeling it, and I'm sure at times a situation like that would be frustrating and difficult. But if I were frustrated about not being able to be with the person I wanted, to me it would be absolutely counterintuitive to be disloyal, regret being with them, or leave. I wouldn't see them as a replaceable person that I could simply go and find someone else who was more convenient that I would feel equally as interested in. Filling the temporary loss of them with a permanent loss of them would be the equivalent of cutting off an arm to ease the pain of slicing a finger.

I wish I had more certainty in my answers on this subject. But it's all hypothetical to me because I haven't felt a connection I was certain of that was that strong, and I'm not seeing any guys right now, so I can only be reasonable confident. But I think of life as so fleeting anyway, I just can't picture anything more important than being with someone I loved however and whenever I could, no matter how limited.

- Nikki

Hi Bo,

I hope "someone like [me]" is a good thing! But please don't apologize, I really enjoy your messages and find them stimulating. I wanted to send one last message through this site just to note my email address, nk8179@outlook.com. I'll send my next message from there so if it winds up in your spam folder, it's me and it's safe, I promise.

I hadn't heard of the opponent-process theory of emotion, so that article was very helpful. It makes sense, with some of the familiar elements of the old adages of too much of a good thing, hard work breeding prosperity, and absence making the heart grow fonder, though I thought the scientific presentation and analysis made it particularly new and fascinating. The examples you gave were interesting too - I particularly had never considered jealousy or envy in that light.

Regarding your hypothetical, I think I would definitely look to ways to adapt and be open to alternative avenues to make the best out of that situation. Honestly if both parties in the relationship consented, I wouldn't really consider it wrong to have a sexually open relationship in that situation. Or in any situation, for that matter. But for me personally, sex with someone who was not that man would hold no interest. I've already made the decision that I'll be celibate my whole life if I never meet the kind of person I want to be with, so I truly believe that meeting a man like that would do nothing but strengthen my resolve in that. In some ways it's loyalty, but it's also in care for others and even probably a little selfish. I believe I'm responsible for the impact my actions have on others and sex is such an emotionally messy, complex act. If my heart was with the man in jail, I wouldn't carelessly demand sex from another man if there were even a remote possibility that they might desire or feel any kind of emotional connection beyond just the physical action. Another factor for me, the selfish part, would be that I would worry that sex with someone else would result in my feeling much worse than if I'd refrained all together. Because I know my ability to live without it and how emotionally I connect with sexual acts, I know if I did begin an outside sexual relationship that I'd just be using that other person, and sex in general, as a fruitless tool to distract from the man in jail. I don't think I'll ever be emotionally strong enough that sex with a person could be just sex.

On the other hand, the open-but-closed long distance relationship sounds completely logical and desirable to me, even for someone like me. Really, for exactly the reason that you stated - I would feel guilty asking a man to stay with me, unconditionally and forever, in a relationship with significant inherent stresses long physical distance. Even if they were not long-distance, if I cared enough about someone to be willing to be in a relationship with them, I'd want them to pursue fulfillment in their lives however they chose to. If they found someone else that they desired to be with, I'd want them to feel safe enough to tell me and free enough to do so. It would hurt, but I'd never want someone to demand that I stay with them when I no longer wanted to, and so I wouldn't do that to someone else. I only see value in relationships that act as a tie to help two people move forward together, not obligations that hold one or both back.

- Nikki

Hi Bo,

I'm glad the pictures went through, the way that I inserted them I thought Outlook would compress them but I guess not. To be fair none of them looked like that to start, I'm not a very advanced editor but they're all cropped/brightened (I would have sent originals but they were larger files). Thank you for the video on getting RAW for the T3i! That was helpful, and I was a little relieved it wasn't just a simple press of a button that I'd somehow been missing.

I traveled a lot last year especially - I traveled at least a week a month for work, which was too much for me. Now I'm back to just traveling for pleasure and I'm much happier. Taking a domestic trip this year would be fun! There are so many places in the US I haven't seen. Are there any places you were considering visiting this year?

That Astronomy software is amazing. I've never seen a flight simulation game before, is it like a full simulation of flying a jet from takeoff to touchdown? It sounds interesting, like pilot training. The only PC game I've played lately is Dragon Age, but that's more like mindless RPG than the ones you showed.

I haven't seen 50 Shades of Grey yet, but I know I'd like to take a nighttime (small plane) flight over Seattle. Daytime too - every time I fly in over the skyline it's so beautiful with the city and then the ocean and islands beyond it. I haven't heard of that 'Captivating' book, it's a really interesting premise so I will definitely check it out. Most of the time I stay away from Christian books about women because they're so incredibly misogynistic and essentially rooted in women needing to pay for Eve forcing Adam to sin and dooming mankind. This book sounds like it comes from the opposite of that, so I'm interested to read it.

For work, currently I'm acting as a manager over a team of financial auditors and analysts, but before that I was/am a financial auditor. It's not my first love (managing or auditing) but I'm good enough at it to feel like it's somewhat valuable. What do you do for work?

Regarding relationship boundaries and trust, for me I'd expect to not only be candid about things like that if they happened, but to bring it up if I thought there was even a potential for it to happen with another guy. I think dating multiple people when there's no express commitment is fine, but that intentionally withholding information like that, that could potentially hurt the other person, is cheating. Again that's easy for me to say because it's hypothetical for me - I naturally tend to date one person at a time because I really focus in and try to see what kind of potential is there, and emotionally I find it too draining to try and do that with multiple people. But if it came up, that's how I would approach it. More than that, I'd just want to be an open book about almost anything going on in my life. Being able to feel safe enough to share anything is a big part of what I really lack and need from a relationship.

Hi Bo,

Yes, my job was a little like that! I'm probably a better manager than I was an auditor, but I find them both okay - they definitely keep me busy. I'm pretty tough at work so I'd be a terrible teacher or anything like that, this is just my softer side. :-) Do you enjoy working in IT? You seem good at it.

All of those places sound lovely. I had to look up Lucia, that looks beautiful. There are so many good places, I try to figure out when and then where. Yosemite and Las Vegas are high on my list because I've never been to either, and Hawaii. I actually looked at cruises out of New Orleans and Alaskan cruises for this year, a few months ago. I love New Orleans when it's not humid, but I'm always torn on cruises because I enjoy them but I also find them intensely lonely sometimes. I'm also hoping to go to the San Juan islands (the ones over here near Canada) this summer to stay and see the whales. There's something that I'd like to see in just about every state.

Until I speak with you next, have a great week!

- Nikki

Bo,

Hah! I don't know, I mix up emails a lot, it's pretty easy to do. :-) I completely agree that being purposefully flexible is more difficult than adhering to pre-set rules. I feel an obligation to set standards and values for myself, but I've always thought of blindly following rules prescribed or imposed by others as a cop-out. I have difficulty determining what I would do in certain situations for that reason—I know that I want to do what I think is right in each unique circumstance I find myself in. But since I'll have to decide that based on all the known variables at the time, I can't imagine arbitrarily rejecting most actions before the need to act arises. There are some exceptions of course, like harming myself or someone else. But especially in things like what would constitute an acceptable sexual relationship between consenting adults, I just can't imagine passing judgment on something like that, even on my hypothetical future self.

Regarding your hypothetical, I think it's possible. I certainly think that I would do anything for a partner I loved, and even in relationships with friends and family I've extended myself in other ways fairly significantly. It wouldn't be an action that I think I would be able to take easily or casually. But ultimately I've never intentionally denied someone I loved of something that they needed if it was in my power to give. Similarly with dating others while in a long distance relationship, it's not a prospect that excites me but it isn't one that I'd rule out, either. I just have a hard time picturing a scenario where those factors would be significantly burdensome to me, to the point where I'd have an interest with other men. But if they were and if it was necessary, I would do what I could to maintain the relationship I thought was valuable.

I have no major hesitations about skin to skin contact with men that I trust (or am deciding whether to trust, I guess). Though, being completely nude would definitely take a lot of trust. I've found that the more clothing that comes off, the faster things can spin out of control. So the less that I'm wearing, the more vulnerable I feel. But with the level of trust that I'd need to feel to even consider someone a long term partner, I think it's fairly likely that I'd feel entirely safe with that person by that point.

I'm torn on my own insecurities. I find they don't impact how I think of myself or my professional life too much, so I accept them, but they can be problematic in how I deal with others personally. I consider them rooted in the choices that I've made as I've grown and since I generally tried to make decisions I thought were best, I accept the consequences of them. For example, as a child I was a big reader and day dreamer but I grew up without a lot of stability, so I learned to be intensely focused on finding a path to provide that for myself through my studies and career. I mostly set aside my other interests and the emotional impact that had in favor of this idea that I could pursue those things after I could provide basic necessities for myself. For people who now know me as an adult, they tend to mistake that desperation for ambition or natural inclination and assume that's what makes me. Likewise, I have difficulty setting aside that intense focus and accepting unproductive emotions. So I often feel awkward or dull with new people because I've spent so long only engaging in these narrow areas – basically I know there's more to myself, but expressing that is difficult. Both because I never made it a priority and because after feeling like it's been such a struggle to survive, I feel very reluctant to expose that kind of vulnerability.

Your discussion on jumping from perfect moment to perfect moment is really interesting. I think I understand. When I was young, I spent a lot of time considering what I might wish for if given the opportunity, and what I ultimately decided on was that I wanted to be able to control and slip in and out of dreams or alternate realities. Basically I wanted to live out one fantasy and move to the next while always having the ability to "come back" to my real life—essentially I wanted the best of all the worlds. To me it's always been a race against Time, trying to fit everything I wanted to experience into an unreasonably short period like a puzzle. I believe that's why I place such an importance on love and selecting the right significant other, because if I had to pick one "best" thing to experience in life, for me it's always been that.

Bo,

That's an interesting take on money, I like the phrasing of "money disappear[ing] altogether". I agree - I've never agreed with the idea that money was meaningless, but treating it as if it were more than simply a tool didn't make sense to me, either. Honestly if I had to choose one side to fall on, I'd rather be without than be in love with money. It seems like such a tragic love - everyone who I've met that is clearly in love with money is so selfishly obsessed with it. Even though it's clearly incapable of loving them back, they seem to become so fixated on obtaining more or enough that their love is in some way returned that there's no room for anything else and it brings out the worst in them. For me, money has always represented freedom, the ability to "buy back" time from endless toiling in order to do the things in life that I want to do. I appreciate it in the same way I appreciate my car or even drinking water - it's a powerful tool but only that. It holds value only in its usage.

I believe I understand your struggle regarding infinite variety versus exclusivity. I've always thought the concept of true freedom was kind of a cruel ideal because I don't believe there really is such a thing. You can choose to act or not act but there's no ultimate freedom from choice. I resent externally-imposed restriction in general and have always hated that limitation on life. But it is maddening, like it's almost a sin to want all of the things life offers. I understand why it's more desirable in a society, but I don't truly see why it's more noble to want to hold one thing exclusively than to want to touch all of the amazing things. I see them as equally valid approaches - one where you aim to taste all the flavors and one where you aim to be satiated. But of course that just makes choosing between them more difficult. Have you encountered anything like what you described, that negated the dilemma?

Regarding things getting out of control with contact, it's usually the guy.

- Nikki

I have an almost adversarial relationship with Time. I consider it sort of like a nemesis, though I (grudgingly) respect it as a separate entity that's older and more powerful than I'll ever be. Still, I've always resented feeling powerless against it, and tried to differentiate between my perception of controllable event flows and this sort of independent entity of 'Time' that represented to me the collection of world changes external and independent of me. Because I started in a place I felt was undesirable and knew I only had a finite amount of time to change that, I've always felt rushed to barter with Time in order to exchange whatever I have for my desired events and goals.

Money is one of the main things I barter with, but I completely agree that many people mistake its purpose and do ill-advised things, like saving up their entire lives for a retirement that their health will never let them actualize. I think so many people just seem to lack purpose and understanding of their true desires for life, and it really shines through in how they live, especially related to money. I find the concept of living each day like it's the last overwhelming and difficult, but I think it's a concept that's just raw in its truth, not something to hide from. The present is vast and overwhelming in its opportunities but that's what makes it worth witnessing and living in – I've never understood looking to the future as a means of hiding from the present.

I usually leave the best for last with food, as well. It's funny how often that concept appears – I also note it when I prepare for some down time. If I'm set to watch a movie or have a quiet day at home, I'll often spend the time before cleaning and doing chores because the satisfaction of knowing that it's all cared for by the time I sit to do whatever relaxing activity is as great as the activity itself. I think of the anticipation or preparation almost like a feeling of pressure that wells up. Truthfully I think it's why most of the men I've encountered have those kind of control issues. I think they've all meant well, but since they lacked the experience in flirting with discipline and anticipation, when I presented them with boundaries and then loosened those boundaries, it was overpowering. Still, it makes for disappointing experiences because you have to hold back so far from the line just to keep the other person from recklessly barging over it.

Well, I've set aside the whole day Saturday, so I'll be available whenever you wish to meet – I'd be happy to spend the whole time chatting but I didn't know how much you might be interested in seeing. I know it's a long trip. There's a coffee shop called the Poulsbohemian in Poulsbo, WA, that's comfortable and easy to find. We can meet there whenever you make it across on the ferry. If it's early and nice weather we can head to the park or beach and make a day of it, and if not we can head to dinner (lots of restaurants nearby).

I'm sorry you experienced those travel difficulties. I'm selective about my airlines for that reason, though it is difficult to find good choices from the south/southwest to Seattle. I've only ever had bad experiences with AA though, so I'm not surprised. I'm sure you'll get your money back, at some point.

My writing to you was not contingent on whether you visited Seattle, it's only contingent on wanting to write. You proposed traveling out here and the burden was entirely on you, both physically and financially, so it was always your right to go or cancel. What I had an issue with was you essentially stating that you decided that neither I nor our potential interaction held any value (and thus you were canceling your trip). That's what I was offended by, and while that may not have been how you meant it, that's how it came across. It was also the first time I felt we were a true impasse in terms of outlook. I enjoy hypotheticals but that's all that they are to me, and responses can vary depending on the day. But I think I'm a unique person, as are the people I seek to interact with. I never question the value or impact those kind of personal collisions make, because just to be fundamentally changed and see something new is the only thing of any real value, to me.

I'm not interested in selling my non-work time; it's mine to give and that freedom wouldn't exist if I sold or accepted gifts in exchange for it. I'm happy to continue writing to you but I don't want anything for it.

Nikki,

I know I said I wasn't going to write you again, however today I got an alert from UPS stating that you had sent the package back. I really wasn't surprised, but I had hoped you might have at least opened it before refusing it.

I figured out what I wanted to say to you. I'm sorry it took me so long, but I wanted to get it right. I agree with you that life without love is meaningless. If I had to pick just one "best" thing to experience in life, for me that would be it.

Love has always been in some ways a perplexing paradox to me. I believe with the strongest conviction that the feeling and sense of 'perfect love' exists. If a girl truly came to know and love me with every fiber of her being and in such an intensely fervent way then I would necessarily give myself to her and devote my entire life to her no matter who she was or what she looked like. I think this is because being able to make someone else so happiest and to really give them that kind of love in return is actually one of the greatest if not the greatest joys and pleasures and forms of happiness in life, at least to me. It is not because I feel that I am worthy of being loved in such a way, but if someone did love me like that I wouldn't have the heart to turn them down, and in fact I would think it to be so lovely and beautiful that I would have no choice but to fall in love with them too.

I love what you said about wanting to spend the rest of your life alongside a truly remarkable person, someone whose company and presence you enjoy more than anyone else's. Someone whom you find to be unique and whom you can share life's stories with and relate in life's outlook. A person whom you want to be with for no other reason than simply wanting to be with them.

If the core essence of a person is what truly makes a person who they are, then I want to thank you for having shared with me a deep part of yourself and for the opportunity to witness and partake in such emotional vulnerability, even if for but a short fleeting moment in time. Our letters gave me a record of you, forever memorialized in a snapshot of a particular stage in your life. Thank you for gracing me with such a unique interaction and allowing me to catch a glimpse of your soul. To know that you existed, that you possessed such deep inner beauty and that you mattered.

You once told me that you spent a long time looking for the man that you wanted to end up with. I don't think that is ridiculous sounding nor naïve at all. If anything, it is incredibly endearing to be able to have the capacity to miss someone whom you might not have ever met before. That is such an enchanted form of loyalty and devotion. It is so very beautiful. I hope you find someone who will rouse that deep seated feeling from within you and to awaken that sort of aliveness locked deep inside of you. And even if he never materializes, I hope you can find it enough to merely write to him and to write about him anyway as if he existed and was already and always besides you.

If you can find it in your heart to take such an intensely personal pledge of commitment and to kneel down to and recognize something like that as the center of your world that everything else revolves around, then I think you would have in some ways already manifested what you wanted in your life.

While we may have had a lot of differences, when it pertains to this I believe we share nearly identical commonalities and I can definitely empathize and relate to everything you shared with me. This is not something anyone can merely write about without being affected, influenced and moved by these thoughts, ideals and beliefs and perspectives in life.

We were like two ships passing in the night, each going in a different direction desperately trying to get back to a different home port and both equally as lost in the process. I'd like to think our brief communication had meaning and value and that we had bumped into each other for a special reason and purpose. And that through our exchange of information we were in some ways indirectly able to mutually help each other get a better bearing and get to our ultimate destinations faster. Thank you for helping me find what I wanted within myself. And for helping me realize the things that I truly find most precious and important in life. I'm very sorry for having expressed and verbalized my frustrations and disappointments when I realized that I had wasted your time because I wasn't the guy you were looking for. But we are two people who are both looking for the same thing, even if the same thing is not each other. I will always cherish the two weeks or so of passionate exchanges, engrossing conversations and immersive

interactions that we shared. I don't know about you, but I just wanted you to know that for me it was real and unforgettable. I'm sorry I didn't have the maturity to handle it in the way that you would have desired or that you deserved. I hope you can forgive me, I just wanted to let you know that it was never my intent to hurt or offend you.

I wish you the best of happiness and I hope you never stop dreaming. Goodbye.

Bo