

Communication From the Dead

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Communication From the Dead

Robert S. Flores, LPN

College of Nursing

University of Arizona

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Ms. Amari,

Greetings from the dead. You have received this letter after a rather horrendous event. To be perfectly honest with you, I do not know what forces are compelling me to write this. I do not know how it will be taken. Will you read it in it's entirety or will you toss it in the circular file? Will you view me as lunatic or merely a person who just became too weary of life? I have thought about this letter for several weeks. Several weeks have passed and I haven't decided whether to write it and revise or do I subscribe to the Jack Kerouac method and write as the thoughts arrive for a more honest work? Maybe I shall do some of both.

Introductions are in order. I am, or more accurately was, Robert Stewart Flores. Think of me as Bob as I dislike the formality of Robert. I was born in Los Angeles in 1961. I have two older sisters and one younger brother. The winds of circumstances and time

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have scattered my siblings from California to Connecticut. My parents are divorced, having done so just before my 15th birthday. My mother lives in Georgia and has since remarried. My father lives alone in Lake Elizabeth, California. There will be people who will attempt to catalog me in a stereotypical manner because it will be easier for them to view me as a serious dysfunctional person rather than as a person who has made a rational choice.

My parents were marginal parents at best. Talking about problems or feelings was not encouraged. My father was a police officer and to quote him when he spoke to my daughter during a visit, "I never felt comfortable around children", pretty much summed up his parenting skills. Don't get me wrong, he wasn't especially physically or emotionally abusive. Just distant. he did give one of his autos when I told him mine was wrecked and I couldn't purchase one. His concept of parenting was putting food on the table and it ended there. Children were not viewed as children but as marginal adults. My mother was a classic enabler with low self esteem. Mom came from a large family of lower socio-economic class. Dad was from the same background. My father had two older sisters and a older brother. His father was an alcoholic who left his family while my father was still a child. I really don't have much history of him. My mother and my father did not have much contact with either side after I turned about eight years old. While nothing was spoken about this lack of contact with relations, myself and my siblings

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came to the conclusion that the lack of contact and distancing with relatives was a normal function of families. It wasn't until I was older and dating and was exposed to other families that I realized that this wasn't true.

(Several weeks later)

Tonight is my last night on this planet so I guess I will finish this letter. I went from an "A" to "B" student in high school during my sophomore year to having to take summer school after graduation to complete a required course I failed. What occurred was that my parents divorced and my self and my brother and sister had to fend pretty much for ourselves. At nineteen I joined the service. I found an environment in the Army that allowed me to mature and excel. Enclosed in this letter is an example of an Enlisted Evaluation Report, (EER) that will give you an idea of responsibility and duties that I had.

You may question why I have enclosed EERs and job recommendations from after the service. My reasoning is this. After the fact, the University of Arizona will attempted to portray me as a misanthropic, marginal student who was undisciplined and could not follow instructions. This portrayal could not be further from the truth.

While in the service I attempted to attend classes at the University of Maryland. When I couldn't attend classes I went to all the book sales that the libraries would have wherever I was stationed and purchased college text books. I managed to CLEP out 36 credits in general college courses. I had been in the service for six years when I met my

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wife and fell in love. I was married in 1986 in Sierra Vista. After several years I was transferred to Germany. 1988-1989 were horrendous years if you were in the Armed Services. Low pay raises, promotion freezes in response to downsizing gave a poor prospect to service members no matter how hard they worked for career progression.

My rotation back to the states was almost due when Kuwait was invaded. I was stationed at 1st battalion, 7th Brigade (Patriot). The word came down the pipe that a Patriot unit slated to go could only muster 60% of it's personnel for deployment. I volunteered and I was attached to Task force 8/43 (Patriot Heavy). It was the only mobile Patriot unit of the war. It was not my first time in the Middle East as I was also one of the first units that The 11th Signal Brigade sent to the area after the USSN Stark was struck by a missile a few years earlier. During my time in Iraq and later at KKMC in Saudi Arabia two separate events occurred that I did not realize it at the time until I saw a news report five years after my and I put the pieces together.

Normally a field compound is a bustling place. Even after the cessation of hostilities, daily maintenance and operations keep a compound bustling at all hours. The morning of the occurrence the camp was very quiet and there was very little movement outside the tents. It was daylight while I was resting on my cot when I started to get a horrible headache and abdominal cramps complete with nausea. I thought I was going to bust my gut when I managed to get to the slit latrine outside of the wire. My bowels completely evacuated themselves in a few seconds. I managed to clean myself up and

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made it back to my cot. I remember thinking, "Great, I have a case of food poisoning". I remember hearing the chemical alarms going off all morning. We had masked a few times and then had gotten the all clear as additional testing had shown that there were no chemical agents. Looking outside the tent I had noticed a commotion. The medics had found several people passed out on the ground. One poor kid had passed out straddling the latrine. The cause was severe dehydration and electrolyte loss related to the severe diarrhea and in some cases, vomiting. All food sources and personnel were examined but nothing was ever discovered. A month later, back in Saudi Arabia it occurred again but much worse that time. The abdominal cramping and diarrhea was so bad that time that most of the men did not make to the latrine but evacuated wherever they could. It took a few days to clean up the camp. Five years later I discovered that I was in the chemical downwind path when engineers blew up munitions and bunkers that had nerve agents stored in them.

Prior to getting out of the service in 1992 I had written to the College of Nursing requesting information for application and a point of contact so I could call and get some questions answered. what I received was the standard application package and nothing else. Six months prior to my discharge I drove down from Colorado Springs where I was stationed at to Tucson. I came specifically to get some questions answered and my unofficial transcripts examined so I could get an idea of how long I would need

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to finish a B.S.N. The first person I met was Mary Hienkle. Mary Hienkle had the responsibility at the College of Nursing to process all applications. When I arrived at the university I introduced myself and stated why I had made the trip. At first she stated, "I'm much too busy to talk to you". I then asked if there was someone else I could speak to. She informed me that there was no one who would speak to me because I was not enrolled as a student. After trying several different approaches I finally left in disgust and drove back to Colorado Springs.

In June 1992 I left the service and traveled to San Angelo, Texas with the purpose of attending college. I did not have any applicable skills in the Army that translated into the civilian job market. Luckily I qualified for retraining from the local government agency. It was a three year scholarship that paid for two years at a community college and a year at Angelo State University. Through an agreement between the Community College and the University there were no loss of credits on transfer. The scholarship along with my GI Bill allowed me to attend classes and support my family. As my family expenses increased I had to take several jobs that did not conflict with my school. One of them was at a local country western club. I started as a barback and worked my way up to the assistant manager. Because of the nature of the work I would not finish the books and bank deposit until 0430 in the morning. There were many days that I just stood up and went to school. I used to be able to go two to three days without sleep. I

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managed to graduate with 63 semester hours with honors and took my state boards for a Licensed Practical Nurse. I was ready to start my third year at Angelo State University and complete a B.S.N. when My wife dropped a bomb on me.

For two years while I was attending school she kept on saying how she could not stand the town where she was raised and the relationship between her mother and herself was deteriorating. At the start of the third year she stated that she was taking our daughter and son and was moving to Tucson. her rationale was that she wanted to be closer to her grandmother who lived in Sierra Vista. She stated that I could chose to go with her or I could stay in Texas, support myself and be divorced and pay alimony and child support. The military had separated us several times and I was determined to make my marriage work so I went. I wrote a letter apologizing to the people at government agency who had believed in me and help me with the scholarship and I declined the third year.

I found employment at the worse nursing home in the city but I did not know it at the time and applied at the University of Arizona. I transferred with 110 semester credits. The University of Arizona accepted 77 hours which was what I had expected. The College of Nursing accepted 33 semester hours and none of my core nursing classes. That was a slap in the face as they would not entertain the idea of even evaluating the classes. They just refused to accept them regardless.

My first year was paid at the out of state scale as I was not an Arizona resident. I

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believe that it came to \$7500.00 (approximated). I had to take out my first student loans and I still had to work to support my family. My wife kept on procrastinating about getting a job and money was very tight. After being in town eight months she finally got a job at St. Marys hospital. When we had been in town 12 months I was attending an EKG at St. Marys hospital. I had quit my job at the nursing home after six months and had been hired on at St. Joesphs Hospital as a team leader in the transitional care unit. It was for better pay and the hospital reimbursed me for 75% of my tuition. In the middle of my EKG class I had a "feeling". For ten years of my marriage I had handed over my paycheck to my wife and she kept the checkbook. She said that she wanted to do the bills. As money had gotten tight I had tried to get her to let my know what the bills were. She never would let me know. Once she moved the family to Tucson I put the account in my name and started to pay the bills myself. I called my wife on a break from class and she sounded strange. I drove back home immediately to discover that she had a moving van. She and a bunch of her relatives were emptying the house and I mean completely emptying it. It was only after I threatened to call the police did they stop. On the spot we came to an agreement where she took 3/4 of the household items. A stormy divorced ensued. She stated all the politically correct buzz words at the proceedings, stating that I was cruel and abusive but could not prove it as she stated that I had never raised my voice to her, cursed at her, or raised my hand in anger to her. She controlled the

economics of the household for ten years so she could state that I kept her in economic bondage.

One month after my wife left I was struck head on in my car by a kid driving on the wrong side of the road. Because of that accident I have a disc that presses on the nerves in my back and have chronic back pain. On a scale 1-10 on a good day it is a 3 and a bad day it is a 7. I haven't been able to sleep more then 5-6 hours a night because of it. I was afraid to help a patient in bed for almost two years because of it. The pain has diminished my sex life, interfered with my GI tract, caused bouts of depression dealing with the chronic pain. I took a year off from school to deal with my back pain and divorce. I started to attend Pima college part time to better prepare myself at the university.

At the start of my second year as a full time student at the University of Arizona that I tried to get my child support payments decreased as I could not work full time and attend school anymore. The time spent studying was just too great. When you attend the College of Nursing they brief you and let you know that it is almost impossible to work and attend classes at the same time. the study load is just too great. I tried to get an official statement to that effect so I could decrease my child support while attending school. I was told that the college of nursing would not do that.

In order to attend college I maxed out my student loans and continued to work. Following the divorce I had to used part of my student loan monies to take my ex-wife

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back to court to get custody enforced. Each semester brought it's own problems. One semester the car would require \$1000.00 in work, another semester I had an impacted tooth that required a root canal. Even at El Rio clinic it cost me \$800.00. When I got out of the service I was living from paycheck to paycheck, just making the bills. After the divorce it was the same and for the past two years it has been much worse. Three years ago I was one of 600+ people who were let go when the Carondolet system went two million dollars in the red. I attempted to collect unemployment as I looked for a job but was denied as I was attending school part time. It seemed that the DES felt that it was impossible to attend college and work full time. It did not matter that I had been doing just that for almost three years.

Once I was officially accepted in the College of Nursing I couldn't but help notice the attitude that many of the instructors maintained. They sniffed at Associate Degreed Registered Nurses as they were not "Professional". To many of the instructors Licensed Practical Nurses are not nurses despite what the State Board of Nursing states. Most of the instructors who are RNs don't even know the scope of practice for LPNs. The message I kept getting from the instructors was, "You're not a nurse".

I am 41 years old and have come to the conclusion that I deserve and demand respect. I am a human being and I have worth. I had decided that I will stand up for myself and I will be assertive. What I discovered was that being a male and

nontraditional student, and (shudder!), assertive was not compatible with the instructors at the College of Nursing. While the college does maintain a small minority student body it is primarily white women from upper middle class backgrounds between the ages of 20 and 25. The college promotes and desires diversity but they only want their approved diversity and no other. In many ways male nursing students are “tokens”.

Starting my second semester at the College of Nursing events started to unravel. One class I had the instructor would ask for questions. I would raise my hand to answer and would be ignored and the instructor would change the subject. After two or more subject changes and my hand being up for ten minutes she would ask, “Did you have a question Bob?” I was sitting in the front row. This happened several times and I broke the unwritten rule, I stood up for myself. When she finally called upon me I stated that I would appreciate her calling upon me before she change the subject as I felt I could add something to the class. After that she would just refuse to call upon me. After several days of this I quietly got up in the middle of the class and went to the Deans office. She was not in but the Assistant Dean of Students, Pamela Reed was. I explain my problems with the instructor to her. She first started off by saying that I must be mistaken and that my perceptions were wrong. This is a common reply when a student has a problem with the college. It is always your perceptions of the event rather than the actual event that is flawed. Ms. Reed kept on trying to get me to go back to the instructor but I said that if the

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instructor felt secure enough in her position to treat me in that manner in front of my peers then I felt that I could not get a constructive communication from her. It wasn't until I insisted in putting something in writing did Ms. Reed state that she would speak to her and her department head.

A week passes and the instructor is now calling upon me in class again. As I exited out another class later in the day Ms. Reed is waiting for me outside the class. She stated, "We have to talk". She guides me to a room and waves a stack of papers under my nose. "I want you to read this", she stated. It was the Student Code of Conduct. I informed her that I had read it and was familiar with it's contents. "I want you to read it again", she stated. I stated that it was not necessary and asked her what she wanted to talk about. She then pointed out the catch all part of the document. I was familiar with it as in the military Uniform Code of Military Justice has a similar clause. Basically what it states is that a student can be expelled for any activity that interferes with the conduct of the educational institution. She then stated that the questions that I had been asking were inappropriate and could be construed as interfering with the conduct of the class. I then stated that I had asked questions pertinent to the subject being covered that week and that they were based upon experience and practical application. I then asked her for specific questions that she felt were inappropriate. Ms. Reed stated, "Oh, I think you know what

questions are inappropriate". I stated that no, I did not. The conversation was pointless I realized as it was merely an intimidation tactic. I was warned again two weeks later by Ms. Reed after a student in the honors program gave a presentation and asked if there were any questions. I asked a few and was later warned again by Ms. Reed.

In my original group that I started with there was another male student named Mike. A few times during breaks I managed to talk to him privately and asked him if he had any problems. He stated that he kept his mouth shut even if he had questions because he felt that it would ensure his chances of graduation. I asked him if it didn't bother him when female student started to put men down in general in front of him. He stated that yes, it did bother him but he kept his mouth shut so that he would not be labeled.

The one instructor I complained about had an office next door to one of my clinical instructors, Robin Rogers. She was in charge during my first pediatric rotation. For each rotation there are two components. There is a lecture component and a clinical portion. You must get a passing grade in both to pass the class. During my rotation with Ms. Rogers I kept asking what we were allowed to do. she wasn't very specific. She did keep repeating that if we did do something we were allowed to do it could be grounds for dismissal. While in the pediatric ICU I was teamed up with another nurse who was my preceptor. I told her all that I was not allowed to do. I also informed her that I was a LPN so that I could learn more then I already knew. Clinical rotation is completed. Three

weeks pass. I start to get messages from Ms. Rogers that we need to talk. All the times she offers are when I am working. I explain that I can not afford to miss a whole day of work or I will not be able to pay my bills. I did ask her via email what it was about. Ms. Rogers would not explain only that I needed to talk. I finally make it into the office on a free moment Ms. Rogers presents me with four unsigned statements that are said to be from staff members from the hospital. With two statements they are broad and general. "The student is disrespectful and rude to staff and patients". I asked Ms. Rogers to be specific, what did I do or say? She had no explanation for me. These statements were a shock to me as I call the patients by Mister, Misses, or Miss. I never make pet names nor call them by their first name. I have never been comfortable with that. I say please, thank you, and excuse me please. I informed Ms. Rogers that I think I knew why one statement was written. Ms. Rogers cut me off and stated that it didn't matter what I said as the statements in themselves showed a trend and that she was failing me in clinicals because of it.

The classes at the college of nursing have to be taken in sequence. If you fail one you must go back and repeat it before being allowed to continue. this means that you are knocked back a semester. This may not sound very important, just an inconvenience until you factor in student loans. Student loans are due six months after graduation or when you drop to less than half time. The times that the nursing course are given are not

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compatible with the time other classes are offered at the main campus. So I repeated the class and was dropped back a semester. I was less than half time and I had to start to pay my loans back. Because of this I fell behind my child support payments. I became in arrears. If you are in arrears in the State of Arizona you cannot get a RN license, or renew a current LPN or RN license.

I retake the course and get a "B" with another instructor. I started the fourth semester this fall. I had an ICU class and a Psyche class. Before passing medications the student it required to pass a computer test several times. Prior to the ICU class I had to pass the test with a 90% or better. I did. The instructor, Barbara Monroe, made it a point to pass medication with all the students for the first time before they were allowed to pass medication with a preceptor. I passed Ms. Monroe's test and was allowed to pass medications. On the third day of clinicals I went over my medications with my preceptor. I explained what they were, what they were for, the normal dosage, and the side effects. She felt comfortable with this and said to administer them. Now you have to realize that the State of Arizona, by virtue of my license which states I am competent, allows me to administer most medications. I made a mistake. I administered all the correct medications to a patient but the preceptor was just outside the door as I did it as the instructor was walking by. Big violation and I am written up for that. Ms. Monroe had the students arrive at North West hospital on a Monday afternoon after lectures to pick

patients. It would be the students responsibility to write up a care plan to the cellular level prior to 0645 the next morning. Ms. Monroe stated to the students that it would take around 5 hours to do so per patient. This was an overly optimistic projection and it is common for students to be up until 0200 or 0300 to complete the paperwork. Ms. Monroe covered herself by stating in the syllabus that all students are to be asleep by midnight the night prior or they may be a safety hazard which can lead to them failing the clinical.

I have never claimed to be a computer wizard but I am neither a computerphobe either. While at North West hospital I had problems downloading some information from a patient. I looked in the chart but the hard copies were not there. I asked some of the staff for help but they merely said, "It gets like that sometimes". The next day I informed Ms. Monroe. She helped me download the information. The next day I have a patient who is on heparin IV with titration adjusted to a lab called a PTT . The PTT measures clotting factor time. You start by bolus of heparin at the start of the therapy that is based on the patient's weight. blood is drawn every six hours and the PTT measured after each adjustment. If the PTT is within therapeutic range twice in a row then the blood is drawn every 12 hours. My patient had been on the medication 10 days. She had been adjusted up and down. The day I took care of her lab was due at 0800. Ms. Monroe walks by and asks for my calculations. I proudly show her my copy of the weight based protocol. She

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said no, she wanted my calculations. I informed her that there wasn't a calculation until the lab results were available but I had been checking every 15 minutes. She then became upset and stated that she wanted the bolus, initial weight based calculation. I informed her that it had no bearing on that days care but I would do it for her. It took less than a minute.

The week ends and I have a non required weekly meeting. Two weeks prior I had a meeting on Friday at 1300. I had worked the 1900 to 0700 shift the night before and had missed the meeting. I was written up for that. So, at the end of the week I am informed that I had failed the clinical portion of the ICU rotation. These are the reasons given. (1) Administering a medication with the preceptor outside the room, (2) Not having the information ready on my patient, (the computer glitch), (3) I was totally lost on heparin administration, (her words), (4) Not calling in when I missed the non required meeting, I had been falling asleep in the meeting after clinicals in the hospital and I was warned that it was becoming a safety issue. In light of this I printed out a patient's history and physical rather than write it out on her document care plan. For this I was cited as (5) Not knowing my patients. I attempted to say that she had warned me twice about being sleepy during clinicals so I had saved some time by printing out the information. Ms. Monroe stated that she didn't want to hear it. I then explained to her that if she failed me I would be kicked out of the College of Nursing and would not be allowed back in. I stated that I

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would not be able to repay my student loans on a LPN's salary and pay child support. I stated that if I defaulted on my student loans I could not get financial aid if I went to Pima College for their Associate Degree Nursing program. I explained that when my license came up for renewal I would not be allowed renew it and I would be back in the same state I was in when I got out of the service, no marketable skills. Ms. Monroe stated "It doesn't matter". She then denied warning me about falling asleep in clinicals. The worse insult arrived when she stated that I was unsafe. That was the biggest insult.

That was on a Friday. On Monday night the following week I was working at North West hospital on the same unit. Instead of two patients I had six. I was told that I was a good nurse and I welcome back anytime. After being failed from clinical at North West hospital I have worked as a nurse on the telemetry unit, the neuro unit, and the medical/surgical floor. In psychology there is something called a precipitating event. That was mine. Even with the bleak prospect staring me in the face I managed to study for a huge psyche test and scored an eighty-four percent.

On Friday when I was basically informed that I was washed up at the College of Nursing I stopped by the IGA store at Speedway and Swan. As I pulled into the parking lot I saw a young man who had just burst out of the exit of the store, trying to subdue another man who had a silver claw hammer in his hand and was hitting him. I didn't think, I reacted. I helped the young man pull the man with the hammer to the ground and

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waited for the police. For my trouble I received a rip in the only pair of good slacks that I had. The man was a shoplifter who had assaulted the store security guard.

The event just underscored the dichotomy of my situation. The College of Nursing did not want people like me. I work as an agency nurse and I have worked most of the hospitals in town and some outside the Tucson area. I genuinely care for my patients and work very hard caring for them. I am told that I am a wonderful nurse who is self directed.

I know what one future brings for me. My jobs from my agency have slowed down. I cannot make my rent this month. I am behind my phone, utilities, auto insurance, and child support. I don't drink, carouse, or have vacations. I have friends but between work and school I never have had time to socialize. I am tired, tired and weary. Rather than spend the next month or two selling what little I have I am going to end it now. The College of Nursing has burned all caring from my being. I find no joy in the future. Even food seems to hold nothing for me. My body is betraying me. I have prostate problems but cannot do anything about it as I have no insurance. Another filling has fallen out and I cannot afford to replace it.

I am rational. I am reality based to the here and now. I understand that I have committed homicide and that I have broken the laws of our society. I will save the taxpayers money and take care of the problem. I realize that I am depressed but even with

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I am rational. I am reality based to the here and now. I understand that I have committed homicide and that I have broken the laws of our society. I will save the taxpayers money and take care of the problem. I realize that I am depressed but even with

treatment it will not change my future. People will want to know why I did this? Why the innocent lives?

To the sociologist, it wasn't the Maryland sniper. I have been thinking about this for awhile. To the psychiatrist, it's not about unresolved childhood issues. It is not about anger because I don't feel anything right now. To Ellen Goodman, it is not about gun control. I have had guns for a long time and it was my trade in the military. I do not have gun magazines. A waiting period or owner registration would not have stopped me. I have a concealed carry permit but I have never brought a gun to the University, (until now). I was a boy scout. I cross the street at the crosswalk. It is not about revenge as I have always thought that revenge was a waste of time and energy. I guess what it is about is that it is a reckoning. A settling of accounts. The University is filled with too many people who are filled with hubris. They feel untouchable. Students are not given respect nor regard. It is unfortunate but the only force that seems to get any attention from the University is economic force.

The American public has a unique tradition. It is called "fixing the blame". Columbine sticks to mind. In the courts the parents vented their frustration through lawsuits. It is due to the threat of lawsuits that the face of education change following Columbine. I will be gone but the same will happen here. The instructors will make statements to the effect that I was unbalanced. I informed them that I was not sleeping

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well, gaining weight, had little energy, difficulty concentrating, feeling sad. These are all hallmark pearls of depression. One instructor asked why I didn't go to the student health center. I replied that it cost money and I would get kicked out of the program if I was candid. The worse that they make me out to be the more ammunition they will give to litigants.

Do I have regrets? I regret that my ex-wife has estranged my children from me. She has moved them 19 times in 6 years. I regret leaving my dog Bridgett. She has been the only thing that has ever given me unconditional love. I regret that there are such people in the world that push a person to contemplate and carry out such an act. I regret leaving those people behind who trusted me and will feel betrayed by this act.

As the curtain closes I will exit the stage for a well deserved rest.

Respectfully,

Robert S. Flores

 LPN