

PROLOGUE

June 30, 2001

*Happy Anniversary Baby,
The past seven years have flown by.
Time flies when you are with your soul mate.
If the rest of my life is anything like the past few years I'm in for a beautiful trip.
You are so my best friend,
my whole heart is filled with love for you.*

I truly love you, Sergio

July 4, 2001 12:20 AM

*My dearest Sergio...
First and foremost, Happy, Happy 33rd Birthday my love!
I am sitting in the kitchen of our beautiful new home, while you sleep so peacefully in our new bed...*

I wanted to take the time to tell you how very happy I am that we have each other and at the same time, how overwhelmed I am with all the emotions that come with being engaged to be married to you, keeper of my heart, and soul mate throughout time.

You have made me so very happy Sergio, from the start of our relationship to today, and knowing that around this time next year we will be husband and wife fills me with a joy so profound, words could never fully express it.

I wanted to start this journal for us as a keepsake to look back on when we hit our golden years together. This is our most special time so far, planning for what will be the most important day in our lives together and I somehow wanted to document all the thoughts and feelings that come up during this time.

I wanted to tell you again that I am so completely head over heels in love with you, and knowing that you are always here for me, loving me the way you do, has really made me feel so incredibly thankful to be so blessed with such a beautiful life. I cannot think of anything that could possibly beat waking up with the feeling of being loved by you, and I hope that you always know that I have and always will love you forever...

I'm going to close for now- I feel the need to go and give you the chills...*

I love you baby- thank you for making me the luckiest woman in the world-

Nana

*Sergio loved for me to "give him the chills" by softly tickling his back

Tuesday Morning

September 11, 2001

I was up early, the new norm for me since our engagement, my mind always racing with plans for and fantasies about our wedding. It was “the start of a beautiful Election Day”, according to the Weather On the 1’s forecast on NY1 news, and as I waited for Sergio to come home from his twenty-four hour shift at the firehouse, I excitedly anticipated voting for the first time beside him, a milestone for me after becoming a US citizen two years earlier. I sat at the edge of our bed giving myself a manicure, another new thing I did regularly so I could show off the spectacular radiant-cut diamond and platinum engagement ring that Sergio had given me. Pat Kiernan, the morning anchor, was going into a more detailed report on the day’s headlines when he announced the breaking news: “This just in...a plane has just crashed into the World Trade Center...”

My attention now diverted from my nails to the 13-inch television screen, I watched and listened as they started to stream the live video footage of the two towers and the huge cloud of black smoke spewing upwards from a large hole in the one with the antenna on top. John Schiumo, a reporter for the station, had called in on his way downtown to give his eyewitness account and like so many other people who first heard the news, he speculated that it must have been a small private plane, maybe a Cessna, that had run off of its course. As he got closer and it became clear that it was a commercial plane that caused the destruction and growing chaos around him, I still imagined it was a small commercial plane. Even though I had been at the World Trade Center that summer, for some reason or other, my mind wouldn’t let me conceive of the size of the two towers, and it was certainly beyond my realm of imagination that a jumbo jet could disappear into the side of one.

I called the Brooklyn firehouse, Ladder 132, a few times and the line was busy so I tried Sergio’s cell phone, thinking he might already be on his way home. When his voicemail picked up and I hung up, knowing he was still in the firehouse, I couldn’t connect with the magnitude of what was happening downtown. I was almost nonchalant when I called my mom with the news at her Queens office, and she told me that people were leaving their desks to go and watch it on the cafeteria’s television. I called my friend Genny, and Sergio’s mom, Delia, at her Bronx office, and even after she reminded me that Sergio’s brother-in-law Louis worked down there, I still couldn’t wrap my head around the fact that thousands of people were being impacted by the crash. And even as I watched, live, as the second plane so purposefully careened into the side of Tower 2, I was disconnected in the way I would be had I been watching an action-packed Hollywood blockbuster.

“Girrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrl we are under terrorist attack!!!” I proclaimed to my best friend Deborah, who I had awoken at the crack of dawn, LA time. “Turn on your TV...”

I made that same call to so many of my friends, and between each call I tried in vain to get through to the firehouse. Little by little, I became aware of how “big” the situation was, my reaction delayed in response to the shock of witnessing the attack. I became aware that people had just died on those planes and in the offices that were hit. I became aware of the danger that all the other people in the area were in and with that, called Sergio’s sister, Maricel, to find out if she had heard from her husband Louis who worked down there. I could hear the panic in her voice when she told me she hadn’t. And with each busy signal that I got from the firehouse that reassured me that Sergio was still safe, I became more aware of the peril that the members of his assigned firehouse were in, Engine 4 in the South Street Seaport, because they would be second due at the World Trade Center.

I was standing a few feet in front of the television, cordless phone in hand, deciding what to do next, mesmerized by all that was transpiring when I watched the first tower collapse. Though I was over 15 miles away from downtown, the shock-wave of pain from the loss of thousands of lives shot through me like a blast from a nuclear bomb, and a primordial wail, startling in my ability to produce such a sound, erupted from me. If the wail could be translated into words it would have read “what..the..fuck...what the FUCK WHAT THE FUCK SERGIO’S IN THERE- NO HE’S NOT!!! ALL OF THOSE PEOPLE!!! OH MY GOD ALL OF THOSE PEOPLE, ALL OF THOSE PEOPLE!!!” All of those people.

My friend Genny would later tell me that she called me right after that, and I hysterically screamed that Sergio was down there and I was going to look for him. That must have been the point where my denial kicked in because I have no recollection of this, but I do remember sobbing uncontrollably realizing that the guys from Engine 4 were probably lost. I remember calling the firehouse and when no one picked up the phone, I told myself and everyone else that Sergio had probably just left and was going to look for his friends.

After the second tower collapsed I told myself and everyone else that they probably didn’t arrive until after, because they were so far into Brooklyn and there was no way that they could have gotten there in time. I heard from Sergio’s mom that Louis was okay and Maricel was on her way to pick him up in Woodside. I told my mom to come straight to my house and heard that my older brother Karl would pick up my nephew Danny, and that my sister Michele, my other brother Roy and his family, were safe.

There must have been a lot of phone calls made, because within hours, my house was filled with family and friends who came to wait with me for news from Sergio. There

were so many of us crowded into my living room, watching over and over again, the footage of the second plane crash and the two towers collapsing. I don't know if it was desensitization or my further denial that caused me to see the debris of the collapses as something almost weightless. I imagined then and for a long time thereafter, that everything fell into an organized pile of light-as-soda-can metal beams which formed a huge shelter for many that survived but were trapped inside. I even went so far as to picture them gathered around oil drums with fire for light and warmth, waiting to be rescued, like a scene out of a Mad Max movie.

I don't know what time it was when Mayor Giuliani held his first press conference stating there was an unimaginable loss of life, including a large number of firefighters and rescue workers. I felt so sorry for him when I saw the pain on his face as he told us it would be a while before we would get an accurate number. In spite of this, I was reassured by him that there were a great number of emergency personnel working to save as many survivors as they can, and I told myself and everyone else that Sergio was one of those down there working, and it may be a while until we would hear from him.

Late in the afternoon, we were given an FDNY phone number to call for updates on the firefighters. I calmly called every hour, with no information available. At about 10:00 p.m., I was told that a list would be available soon after at Fort Totten, where the FDNY does training. I went with Delia, Maricel, and Louis, and we were told to wait with some other families in an upstairs waiting room. I asked a young woman, "Who are you related to?" and she said "(one of the guys) from Engine 4..." and I said, "I'm so sorry..." Or maybe I thought I said it, when someone came in and whispered something to another woman who let out a scream not unlike the one that came from me when the first building collapsed. She fell to her knees, screaming and sobbing, and when someone reached out to comfort her, she shrieked:

"GET THE FUCK AWAY FROM ME!!!"

I looked at Maricel, Delia, and Louis, and said, "We don't belong here-we need to go," and we made a beeline for the parking lot and drove quickly back home to wait for Sergio's call.

It was later that night when I got a call from the firehouse and one of the guys, Fitzzy, told me they hadn't heard from the six men on the truck. I asked what time the truck had left and he said that it was some time after the second plane hit, but they were still unsure of whether or not they had gotten there before or after the collapse. He told me it was really chaotic down there and since there was a lot of confusion about where many of the companies were, it was way too soon for any of us to jump to any conclusions. He also said to keep trying the FDNY hotline. When I called in at about 2:00 a.m., I got the

“official” news from headquarters that Sergio was on the list of those that were “missing and unaccounted for”. It didn’t matter that I heard those words, because my mind was already made up- until I got definite news that he did not make it, I was going to remain calm and stay strong for him, for our families, and for our friends. I convinced myself that if I gave up, then he would also, especially if he were trapped.

I didn’t sleep that night, though I was very aware of the need to take care of myself and made many failed attempts to rest. Most of the friends who had come during the day remained into the night and through the next morning. At different times some would leave for a few hours to check in with their own families and change their clothes, but all returned with food, drinks, and hopeful attitudes as we continued to wait for Sergio’s call. Some even brought lawn chairs which they set up in front of our building for those who needed fresh air or a cigarette break. As the news continued to spread to other friends and neighbors that Sergio was on the missing list, more and more people began to show up with their support.

In the early afternoon, a well-dressed stranger came rushing into our apartment, and my first reaction was to think he was a detective or someone sent to give me news that Sergio didn’t make it. With my heart ready to burst out of my chest, I stood up, extended my hand, and calmly introduced myself as I dreaded the worst.

“Yes- I’m Sergio’s fiancée, Tanya, how can I help you?”

He turned out to be a childhood friend of Sergio’s whom I had never met before, Andy. I was enraged that he could just burst in like that, but relieved when I realized he wasn’t a detective with horrible news. Apparently he had some connections somewhere and was making calls from two different cell phones, trying to find any information about Sergio. About an hour later and after calling the FDNY hotline, he told me Sergio was off of the missing list and okay.

“Are you sure? What number did you call?”

“Yes, I’m sure, I tried the hotline several times and they said he’s okay...”

I didn’t believe him and called myself, with everyone gathered around me as I stood near the window of my dining room.

“Hello...I’m calling to find out about Sergio Villanueva from Ladder 132...”

“Let’s see...Villanueva...I don’t see his name here...”

“Does that mean he’s off of the missing list?”

“Yup...he’s not on my list...”

“Are you sure? So you mean to tell me that no one is going to come to my house and tell

me that he's not coming home?"

"No, he is no longer on the missing list- he is accounted for and okay..."

I was drowning in relief as I tearfully screamed to everyone in the room, "He's accounted for and OK!!! He's accounted for and OK!!!"

Everyone was jumping up and down, crying, laughing, chanting, "He's OK, he's OK, he's OK!!!"

I had to quiet everyone down so I could find out where he was, and though the man on the phone didn't know, he assured me that I would be hearing from someone soon and told me to sit tight and wait because it might take a while given the continued chaos and troubles with the phone lines. I hung up the phone, the happiest I had been since our engagement day, and my friends suggested I shower, put on some make-up and be ready to go for when the call came. Lorena, the mother of Sergio's goddaughter, even went so far as to say "when you see him you guys better head straight for church and get married!"

I thought about our appointment which we had with the catering manager at The Fountainhead reception hall the following morning. We had gone to a friend's wedding there a few years before and after seeing it again following our engagement, we fell in love with the chapel area and decided to book our ceremony and reception there. I called to reschedule:

"Hi, my name is Tanya Bejasa, and my fiancé, Sergio Villanueva, and I have an appointment tomorrow morning to book our wedding there for next year...uh, he was one of the firefighters on the, um, missing list, but he is off the list now and we are still waiting to hear from him..."

I started to break down but stammered on in spite of my tears.

"Anyway, we wanted to book August 1st of next year for our ceremony and reception but with everything going on I don't think we can keep our appointment tomorrow. Can you please hold that date for us- August 1st, 2002?"

The woman on the phone reassured me they would, and wished me luck as we hung up. Sometime that afternoon, a list was put up on the internet of people who were missing and their status. Under Sergio's name, someone had typed in that he was "accounted for and OK", in corroboration with the FDNY hotline. As the hours passed with no word from any one, our joyous anticipation morphed into unspoken anxiety. We waited and waited, and waited some more. The day turned into night and exhausted, I made another call to the FDNY hotline to see if there was any new information:

“ I hate to bother you, but my fiancé, Sergio Villanueva from Ladder 132, was on the missing list and was removed earlier today and they told me he was accounted for and okay, but we still haven’t heard from him...”

“Sergio Villanueva...let’s see...well he’s still here on the missing list...”

“But how can that be? We called several times, and they reassured us that he was ‘accounted for and okay...”

“Well, I hate to tell you this, but with all the chaos here and trying to keep this list as up to the minute as possible, at sometime this afternoon we didn’t have the last page, and since you’re looking for Villanueva...”

“But there’s also a website with names and someone put that he was ‘accounted for and OK’ ...”

“I don’t know anything about that website, all I know is what is here in the FDNY list...”

That was by far the worst moment since Sergio was initially put on the list, and I was beyond frustrated, defeated, and exhausted.

After breaking the news to our family and friends, I went to my room to rest while the others hung out in my living room. I dozed off while listening to what we chose as our wedding song, Natalie Cole’s version of The Very Thought of You, and Sergio came to me in a dream that felt so real. There were no words exchanged between us- he just leaned over, and gave me a long, tender kiss. I woke up crying, but still refused to believe that he wasn’t coming home.

As the hours continued to pass and the bombardment of phone calls from family and friends in other parts of the country and from as far away as Germany, Argentina, and the Philippines continued, I knew I had to keep the line free for Sergio’s call. The best way I saw fit to reach out to everyone was by e-mail, and thus began the periodic updates that would detail the events as they unfolded.

For a long time, I would sit down at the computer to write the updates with the belief that Sergio would read them when he came home. I never imagined that they would ultimately become a chronicle of my personal journey through grief.

CHAPTER ONE

The Vigil

From: Tanya and Sergio
To: Undisclosed-Recipient;
Sent: Thursday, September 13, 2001 8:25 PM

Subject: Latest news...

Sergio, along with the other guys from his company are still unaccounted for, but we are staying hopeful. We have heard that there are some unconscious, unidentified patients at area hospitals and a team of friends are doing their best to leave the attached flyer with the hospitals. We also have lots of police friends who will try to go in person to see if they can identify him if he is one of these victims. I am tired, so very very tired, but am trying to keep my spirits up.

The guys from Sergio's company came by the house earlier to drop off food (a ton of it for all of us here) and they also sat with us and reassured us that they are doing everything in their power to rescue them. It totally amazes me how strong their brotherhood is- these guys are physically and emotionally exhausted, yet they took the time to drive over to comfort us and the other 5 families of their missing men.

I also put a sign up at the store saying we are closed until further notice and telling our customers that Sergio is missing. A few friends went by and saw that people have left flowers, a yellow ribbon, and messages. Friends and neighbors have been surrounding and supporting me and our families, bringing food, making sure I eat, drink water, and rest (I've slept about 6 hrs total since Tuesday, 8:30 am). The supermarket donated a platter of cold cuts and sandwiches, which we in turn had brought down to the firefighters at the scene working. It all seems too surreal.

I really appreciate all of the support and prayers and Sergio will be amazed at all the people who rallied to get him home when he gets here. Keep your hopes high, and send out lots of love and strength to him and everyone down there working and waiting.

Love,
Tanya

From: Tanya and Sergio
To: Undisclosed-Recipient;
Sent: Saturday, September 15, 2001 7:02 AM

Subject: The latest...

Hi Everyone-

Still no news. Just last weekend I started to put our personal page together at theknot.com, a wedding website. I sent a first draft over to Sergio for his feedback- this is what it looked like and here is his response. As stressful as the waiting is, we cannot get discouraged- it still may be days before they find him, and when they do we'll be able to go on with our plans.

Remember, POSITIVE thoughts to him and all the others will sustain them.

Love, Tanya

From: Inner Peace (Tanya)
To: Sergio
Sent: Saturday, September 08, 2001 12:49 AM

Subject: Hi Daddy!!! What do you think?

Tanya Bejasa and Sergio Villanueva

August 01, 2002

ABOUT TANYA

Former Cocktail Waitress to the stars, she now owns and operates Inner Peace, a quaint, quaint, (did we mention it's quaint?) gift shop in historic Jackson Heights, NY.

ABOUT SERGIO

Former detective for NYPD, he now fights fires in Brooklyn and spends his down time playing soccer and helping Tanya in their quaint, quaint gift shop. How quaint.

HOW WE MET

Both of them grew up in Flushing, Queens (WOOF WOOF WOOF) and met circa 1987 at Club 10-18 wopping to "Show Me Show Me" by the Cover Girls. In 1994, while Sergio was vacationing in Miami, he bumped into Tanya (who was living there at the

time) and they reacquainted themselves. Sergio kissed Tanya, and she fell head over heels in love.

Sergio went back to NY. (He had no clue.)

Tanya knew that she had to move back to New York to convince him that she was the woman of his dreams.

A year later, she drove a 17 foot UHAUL north so she could claim her man. (She also knocked a Don't Walk sign off of its pole on College Point Blvd.)

It took him a while to realize it, but he finally came to his senses.

(It took several beatings and lots of subliminal persuasion.)

By August 1995 they moved in together, and began to live happily ever after.

WHEN WE GOT ENGAGED

June 30, 2001

HOW IT HAPPENED

Seven years to the day of that first kiss, they were celebrating their anniversary at Angelo & Maxie's, a steak house/cigar bar in the city. Tanya was telling him how lucky they were to still be going so strong, having so much fun enjoying their beautiful business and new home, when Sergio presented her with the beautiful radiant cut solitaire platinum ring. He thought he was buying three more years. HA!!!

WHEN & WHERE

August 01, 2002

From: Sergio Villanueva

To: Inner Peace

Sent: Saturday, September 08, 2001 11:37 AM

Subject: Re: Hi Daddy!!! What do you think?

hey babe, great job. i love it, you are so talented. love the story (very funny) now we really have to go to the fountain head and reserve the hall.

i love you soooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo much bunny.

big daddy

From: Tanya and Sergio
To: Undisclosed-Recipient;
Sent: Monday, September 17, 2001 10:51 AM

Subject: Another day...

So here it is, another day, and though it really is hard to face each new one, we are all hanging in there- it's all that we can do for Sergio and the others. I am trying to look at it as another day closer to finding him.

Attached are some photos taken at the store the night before last and yesterday- it's amazing how many people have left candles, cards, and flowers. There were also members of Sergio's pool (billiards) team that left him an 8 ball and 9 ball. I have all the cards here on an altar to him, and when he gets home, he is going to be so amazed with all the people who are here missing and loving him. He is also going to have a fit that all the candle wax is built up on the sidewalk of the store!

I am feeling so very fortunate too that I have so many good pictures and memories to draw strength from- I know he is looking at them with me and all of our friends and family that have been here. His brother got in yesterday- it is so good to have him home- we were worried that he was in Seattle alone with no support as all of these events unfolded, so now we have the comfort that he's here with us. I am surrounded by amazing friends 24 hours a day- Debbie Dogg (my best friend since childhood) also came in from LA to be here with me. Genny, my dear friend and massage therapist, has been here to take care of me at night when the stress gets too deep in my muscles, and it has certainly helped. She also went over to Sergio's mom's house and took care of her and Sergio's sister.

I am still not watching any news, and it's making a difference. I have also called the firehouse a couple of times to remind all the guys that we are all here loving and supporting them- they really need some encouragement, so please continue to send them some with your thoughts and prayers.

Love, Tanya

From: Tanya and Sergio
To: Undisclosed-Recipient;
Sent: Tuesday, September 18, 2001 10:15 AM

Subject: Good Morning

Today is one week, one very long, horrible, senseless week, but believe it or not, we are still hanging tough. I am here with Steven, Sergio's brother, and take comfort in the fact that my amazing friend Genny is massaging him. Debbie Dogg and Donald are on kitchen duty, and I am waiting for Sergio's mom to come with some family friends. My mom is also on her way with my 5-year-old nephew Danny, who is so optimistic- "Sergio's coming home tomorrow, he just burned his butt." The funny thing is I still feel in my bones that there is so much hope left, and I face this new day with the same kind of optimism, although I am a little afraid that this isn't the day which we will receive news.

I am optimistic that whatever is going to be the end result of this situation, we will get our answers as to why this whole thing went down in the first place. I am optimistic because I take so much comfort in the fact that everything in Sergio's life before this was in place- none of us have any unresolved issues with him, he knows we know he loves us, and we know that he knows of our love and devotion to him. He never has to say "I wish I got engaged, or I wish I went on that cruise, or I wish I went to that party last Sunday, or I wish I told this person I loved them- he did all of the things that he was supposed to do for himself and for us, and he can now focus on just hanging in there and staying hopeful like us. I can't even begin to tell you all how grateful we are that we have sooooooooooooooooooooo many people pulling for us, for the other people who are trapped inside, for the rescue workers- thank you thank you thank you...

From: Tanya and Sergio
To: Undisclosed-Recipient;;
Sent: Wednesday, September 19, 2001 12:55 PM

Subject: Another day...

...closer to finding out news....

Its very easy to think the other way- "another day and still no news" but I know that I am responsible for keeping my thoughts in a place that will serve me, not break me. There is so much I am feeling, and I am trying to cope the best that I can by reminding myself that I cannot change what has happened, and I cannot predict the outcome. The thing I can do right now, is focus on everything I know: I know that Sergio is

unaccounted for, and any speculation on my part as to where and how he is is just that, speculation. I know that we have an amazing, honest, no-holds-barred love for each other and that we have always loved each other fully, completely, endlessly. I know that we have no regrets between us at this moment, and through all of the moments that have passed since this whole ordeal began. I know that I have been through some very trying times in my life, things that I thought I could never get through, and I did, and am wiser for it. I know that we are surrounded by so many people who give us their strength, and that I am able to tap into this when I need to, having already done so during some of the tougher moments I've experienced. I know that Sergio is with me, loving me, because I have received so many little miracles from him. I know that the firefighters from his house just finished working a 48 hour tour and still came by to sit and talk and laugh and process a lot of what we are all going through. I know that things are not standing still, that change is constant, and that there will be answers to why this is happening. I know that the place under the window in our sunroom will soothe me while I try to rest. I know that we love all of you for being here with us, and that I have the power through this email to thank you.

Thank you...

From: Tanya and Sergio
To: Undisclosed-Recipient;
Sent: Thursday, September 20, 2001 11:39 AM
Subject: Still standing...

...and still waiting for news...

I am constantly reminded by the fact that although this is definitely, without a doubt, the hardest challenge I've ever had to face, I am doing it- I am still able to get up in the morning, I am still able to draw strength from so many of the happy, happy memories that we have, and I am, as is Sergio, surrounded by love. Love that shows itself in the 125+ e-mails that I have received so far. Love that shows itself in our beautiful home which we've built together. I look at the hinges and doorknobs on the doors, the towel racks in the bathrooms, the fireplace, the window hardware- all of these things that he worked so hard to bring back to life restoring. Love that shows itself in the friends and family who are around me bringing food making sure I'm taken care of. Love that shows itself in the cards and flowers and gifts- from people we barely know, and from those we've never even met before. This is one of my greatest lessons in this, folks- I knew it then and I know it now- life is so uncertain, and we never know what tomorrow will bring. Be good

to each other, love each other, live without regrets, and focus on what you know. This is what has and will sustain us...

From: Tanya and Sergio

To: Undisclosed-Recipient;

Sent: Saturday, September 22, 2001 4:37 PM

Subject: Coping the best we can...

I wanted to send an e-mail yesterday, but for some reason, my Outlook mail program wasn't working. Funny that it worked out that way, because I guess I just needed a day to feel things through, without trying to analyze too much.

The support around me remains constant, and I am so grateful for that. I'm also grateful that I have the ability to separate myself from my friends when I need to, go to my room, and be with myself and all of the overwhelming feelings that come at me sometimes. I am still taking it minute by minute, and though a lot of people have made up their minds that everyone on the missing is lost, I still cannot and will not arrive at that conclusion until I know in my heart it is true. Thankfully, all of the friends at the FDNY are in constant contact with us, keeping us up to date with the events as they unfold. They haven't given up hope, the search and rescue efforts are still in full swing, so we cannot either.

Two very good friends of ours are firefighters- one has 54 friends who have either died or are missing, and the other has 30. They still go on though, and it amazes me how much strength they have to tap into in order to get through their days- a lot of that strength comes from all of us, and they too are amazed at the amount of support that is out there for them. I have been with our closest group of friends today, and we have been laughing at so many of the memories we have- it's great that they were created in the first place...

My friends and family have also been by with their babies- they remind me of hope for a better tomorrow. Thank you all again, for all of your kind words and support- it comforts me knowing I am not alone in this...

From: Tanya and Sergio
To: Undisclosed-Recipient;;
Sent: Monday, September 24, 2001 2:37 PM

Subject: Still waiting...

I went to a prayer vigil for the guys from Sergio's company and two other companies yesterday with friends and family. It was a hard day, but I got through it. I thought that there was an air of everyone giving up hope, and the grief was a little overwhelming. But, as has been the case throughout this whole thing, I knew exactly who to call to get me through it- one of Sergio's soccer buddies from the FD team who is a Fire Marshall working down there. I asked him if any decisions have been made about the fate of all of the people down there, and he said no- they are still looking and although a lot of time has passed, they are not losing hope.

We have to take this minute by minute, and it is definitely a challenge. I am surprised that these minutes go by- some filled with despair, some with laughter, some with fear, some with love, some with anger, and some with wonder at how we got through them in the first place. I am still grateful for everyone and everything that has brought me comfort thus far, and I know that this support is endless.

From: Tanya and Sergio
To: Undisclosed-Recipient;;
Sent: Friday, September 28, 2001 10:30 AM

Subject: The long haul...

The waiting is getting even harder, but we are still here. Seventeen emotion-filled days of waiting. The support is endless, and we are grateful for all of our friends and family who reassure us that we are not alone in our sorrow. The Fire Department is still working around the clock, and as long as they do, we will not jump to any conclusions- no one knows what kind of voids or resources are down there, so we hope and pray for a miracle.

I know a lot of people who have missing loved ones are already taking the steps toward closure, but I cannot yet, and I trust that when the time comes for me to make any decisions I will be able to do so. Though it was my plan to open the store yesterday, I haven't done so- I am just not ready yet and am staying true to my feelings. I will try to open by Monday, if I feel up to it. I am thankful that our friends who are going to work there are willing to go in whenever I am ready, and I am also thankful that so many people here in our neighborhood are standing by for us.

So many people have asked me how I am doing, and my response is simply, taking it minute by minute. Today I will get a massage, and say goodbye to Steven (Sergio's brother) as he returns home tonight to Seattle. I'll continue to look to my letters and pictures to remind me of all of the wonderful memories that Sergio and I share, and comfort myself with music that touches my soul. I will talk to family, friends, and firefighters who comfort me. I will read all of your e-mails of support and draw strength from them.

And I will wait, and hope, for as long as it takes...

From: Tanya and Sergio

To: Undisclosed-Recipient;

Sent: Tuesday, October 02, 2001 11:40 AM

Subject: Three weeks...

twenty one days, and we are still waiting...

It seems like just yesterday, and at the same time, like an eternity has passed since this whole nightmare began. The past few days I have just wanted my space- my mind just wants to shut this whole thing off, and curl up in bed watching so-called reality TV shows like the Love Cruise. Yesterday was a good day for that as it was cold and a bit dreary here in New York, so I got a few hours of vegging time in, after I stopped by the bank and my accountant's office to square away stuff for the store that needed tending to.

I went in on Sunday with Donald, Robin, and Debbie to clean up the front of the store and to make it ready for reopening yesterday. They had a good day, and so many people stopped in to ask questions and show support. I know that I definitely made the right choice by not going back there yet with Delia, because they were overwhelmed at times with questions, sympathy, etc. I saw a few people in the street as I was on my errands with Genny and it was very hard for me to receive the "I'm so sorry..." or "God is with you..." or "He's a true hero..." comments. I just wanted to run home, and though I'm thankful that there are so many people who want to reach out to me and his family to comfort us, the only thing that will make me feel better right now is news that he's coming home. Since we haven't received this, I try and bring myself back to taking things minute by minute, day by day.

Today I cleaned my floors, put on some good music, opened the windows and welcomed the beautiful sunny day here. I will finish this e-mail, do some laundry, and take care of paperwork for the store. Then perhaps I'll take a walk in the garden, throw on Oprah or a

good video, or just take a long nap. And all the while, as has been the case for the past three weeks, I will wait for news, and believe it or not, I am still hoping for a miracle...

Love,
Tanya