

I now more than ever anxiously await to experience. His passing has made me aware of the reality of life's fragility as well as the vulnerability we all share, simply by being human.

– Jill, age 19

My friend Dominick, after being diagnosed with cancer said, “The cancer didn’t make me big; the cancer made me see how big I already was!” You are on a journey of self-discovery. Salute yourself for all the tears you cry and for all the hours of deep and meaningful introspection ahead. Instead of saying, “I hate my life,” try saying, “I hate my life today.” In that way, you keep open the option of changing your mind tomorrow.

Listen to your thoughts and learn to love the inner process that is unfolding. You have the stuff of heroes in there, but you must believe that. You must believe that it is worth it to stay alive - that it is possible to live with confusion. This is still a good life, even with some of the pain. You must believe that. I do. A student once handed me a letter about her brother who got infected with HIV at the age of fourteen. On his gravestone were etched the words, “Be careful with your life for it is the only one you have.” I am glad I never killed myself after I got the news about my HIV and after the many funerals of my friends.

I am glad I stayed here.

Even if there is a time I can't be composed, I have friends who will be, and if they feel like falling apart I'll be the one standing straight. And if we both lose our wits, I have a plan. We'll cry and cry and then we'll talk. And then we'll sing. As loud and as strong and as best as we can, we will sing. Who knows what makes the earth go 'round, but it is definitely singing that makes the blood keep flowing. Somewhere in the back of my brain, the part that is connected to my soul, I get it. I totally get it. One day I think I'll understand it enough to voice it out loud. Right now, there is only one thing I know for sure. Feeling like your life is over and wanting to let go or just quit is okay. The thing that isn't okay is giving in to that urge. Overrule the unfairness with love, compassion and a willingness to live.

– Alisa, age 17

As you remember compassion of self, know that you are enough.