I decided to go anyway

Dear Bill,

The best mailing address for me, Peter, and Alan is now at our new offices:
National Development and Research Institutes
71 West 23d Street
New York, NY 10010
Tuesday, November 20

. . . we have been working very hard trying to re-locate to our new offices. (By Dec 1, we hope!)
And keeping things going otherwise. Most people have already moved into them. Those of us in
AIDS Research will do so about Dec. 1. . . . On September 29, I began a long journey to
Australia for a couple of AIDS conferences. My wife and friends suggested that it was too
dangerous to go, and too iffy. I decided to go anyway, both because the AIDS work is too
important to be put aside and because I thought I needed some time away for healing. "AIDS
Conference round-up" was written during the closing morning of the International Conference on
AIDS in Asia and the Pacific. . . .

best,
sam friedman

AIDS Conference round-up

As I sit in a Melbourne lecture hall
hearing yet another Manifesto against HIV
and the actions of the powerful
that empower this virus, that encourage its spread,
Annie and Nickie confer quietly beside me
as Alex walks to leave the hall,

and I sit stricken with awe
at our human race,
that we could, in spite of it all
produce a roomful of Angels,
of Annies, of Nickies, of Alexes
and hundreds besides,

and peace washes over my soul
solacing my memories of burning Towers,
of data destroyed by vengeful airplanes,
as I bask in a sunlight of joy
at my wondrous good fortune,
at the privilege of friendship
with angels like these,
at sitting in this roomful of saviors,
these foes of the plague.

Instant connection

As our offices burned,
our towers collapsed,
the TVs roared their anger,
the politicians their hate.

Our first actions
when we at last reached our homes
were to call one another
to be sure the other was there,
that each had survived,
and to e-mail the world
with the words, "We're alive,"

and to process our losses,
the destruction of place,
the erasure of sites
now gaps in our lives,

and our new disconnection
from a nation enraged,
from politicians and TVs
who evoked vengeance and blood-debt
and stoked flame-fed mass hatred

while we responded with horror
at their plans for more violence,
of spreading destruction
like that we had suffered,
rejecting connection
with those who sought blood,
while seeking connection
with workmates and strangers,
forging empathetic connection
with those who faced bombs.

Rejoicing in living,
while mourning all dead,
we build empathetic connection
against blood-spilling's spread.

Terrorism

As I ride my daily train from Jersey 'burbs to metropolis,
I muse about Madame Nhu's ride to America,
about a younger me marching brick sidewalks in innocent outrage,
protesting dictatorship backed by Old Glory,
knowing not, as Madame Nhu knew not,
for neither knew, knew not yet,
that Old Glory would ravage the treetops of 'Nam,
savage her peoples
in an act of power that baffled my generation,
we who did not understand terror,
who knew not that the phrase "balance of terror"
meant only that one tiny facet balanced,
but terrorism was policy, was values
lodged deep in the bomb-bursting stars of Old Glory,
in stars and stripes that grew as a symbol of freedom
from imperial tyranny,
stars and stripes viewed by Shelley and by Asian generations
as a symbol of a glory that could be,
but viewed by generations who knew in the American forests and plains
as a symbol of terrorism set free
to savage Iroquois, Cherokee, Apache, Navaho, Mexico,
and far beyond,
bringers of death and homilies of freedom for 200 years,
so as we protest the starvation of Iraqi children
or devastations yet to come,
or as we watch the talking dreads
seize upon a plane crash that killed my friends
off the coast of Nova Scotia
to tighten the regulation of Americans,
to outlaw the right to organize
in the name of fighting "terror,"
our intestines should indeed turn acid in fear,
in an act of recognition of professionalism in action,
at terrorism incorporate and elected,
but a terrorism in our power
to doom.