

## Longhand project goes by chapter and verse

Written by TAITIA SHELOW  
Saturday, 01 May 2010 13:33 -

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### Bible project presentation Sunday

PHILMONT--The first reaction most people have when they see Phillip Patterson's handwritten Bible pages in person for the first time is "Wow."

It's easy to see why. The precise, yet flowing, black script against the oversized, stark white pages immediately catches the eye. One can't help but stare, feeling like a witness to an ancient manuscript.

Mr. Patterson wasn't aiming for this response when he started his mission, but he's certainly flattered by it now. What began as a personal goal to copy the entire King James Bible has evolved into a multi-faceted force. His chance meeting with an Albany photographer has brought the project, called "The Serenity of Knowing," into the public eye.

"I didn't know this was going to be beautiful. That was not the intention at all," said Mr. Patterson during a recent interview in his Philmont apartment. "I look at it now, and I think, if people like this, I'm okay with it. My hand just does what it does, and anything else is a bonus."

Copying the Bible has become his full-time job, one he approaches with relish and joy. Every day, Mr. Patterson spends 10 to 14 hours on his project--writing, buying supplies, prepping the paper or erasing the pencil marks he draws to keep his carefully inked words in place.

Since 2007, he has written and bound three volumes. The first was a hefty 400 pages, so he made subsequent ones smaller. Each page takes about one and a half hours to write. Mr. Patterson figures he has five or six volumes remaining.

The New York City native moved to Columbia County more than 20 years ago, and some may remember his time spent as night manager at the Old Chatham Shepherding Company's former inn. Though married and expecting a child when he moved here, Mr. Patterson soon thereafter found out he was HIV-positive and came out as a gay man. Decades later, a

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conversation with his partner, who is from the Middle East , led to Mr. Patterson's unusual decision to handwrite the Christian Bible.

“There's an Islamic tradition of writing the Koran and decorating the pages. He asked me, 'Don't you have that in Christian tradition?' The biggest problem with our Bible is it's so big. But at that moment we decided I should do this.”

By then, Mr. Patterson's illness had limited his abilities and he could no longer work. But this project gave him a reason to get out of bed.

“I consider myself fortunate to have this project because it gives shape to the life I'm living. I can bring you a handwritten Bible and that's the gift I can give, given my circumstances. Otherwise, I'm just another person with a disease. ”

He had a deeper reason as well--the often tenuous relationship he has with the Bible, a book used to rail against homosexuality. Though raised a Catholic who attended church schools, Mr. Patterson said that like many people he never really read the Bible. “People are afraid of the Bible and get beaten up by it. I want them to take the Bible back and own it as lay people. I want them to think: If a 60-year-old black man with AIDS can write the Bible, maybe I can do something more.

“I question every day--what do I believe? But I'm not doing this project so I can quote chapter and verse. I let what I learn simply wash over me like a waterfall. What sticks, stick and I keep on moving.”

A chance meeting last year with photographer Laura Glazer has helped Mr. Patterson spread his message. Ms. Glazer worked as an AIDS educator at Albany Medical Center, where he was getting treatment. But AIDS wasn't the common thread that brought their lives together.

“I made a snide comment about a magazine she brought in and she heard it,” said Mr. Patterson. “We spoke for a moment about the magazine and that was it. We were immediately into handwriting and pens.”

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Ms. Glazer added, "I have always enjoyed looking at handwriting, hand-lettering, and to find someone who was so deeply involved in handwriting fascinated me. We had a lot to talk about."

Mr. Patterson had been thinking about hiring a photographer to document his process. After he saw Ms. Glazer's photographs at a gallery exhibit they started working together.

Since then, the two have become close friends, and try to hold photo sessions every few weeks. Ms. Glazer had her first solo gallery showing with Patterson's photos in September, and they have a blog and Facebook page for the project. Recently, they began speaking at churches and expect to hold more talks.

"The project is always evolving, with different aspects coming up. There's a power to the project that we're still uncovering," Ms. Glazer said.

## **Bible transcription goes on display**

SPENCERTOWN--A "Show and Tell" of Phillip Patterson's Bible project, "The Serenity of Knowing," and Laura Glazer's documentation of his work through photographs, will be held Sunday, May 2, at 11:30 a.m. in St. Peter's Church, Route 203.

A potluck lunch will accompany the presentation.