

Brief Encounters with the Taos Institute

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The Conversation, Walking Together

By Saliha Bava and Mark Greene

Sometimes, while standing in the kitchen putting away groceries, the most remarkable things happen.

So, Mark Greene and Saliha Bava have been a couple for ten years. For some, that might be just getting started. For others, it represents a lot of history.

Mark: When I met Saliha a decade ago, I had been thinking a lot about the potential of what I named then as 'being with someone who loves me for who I genuinely am.' My story was that I had been genuinely loved for who I was in relationships earlier on in my life, but I failed to appreciate it and if it happened again, I would not take it lightly. Then, Saliha entered my life and I set that story in place. She loves me for who I genuinely am. I do not take it lightly. It is a blessing.

What's curious, is that when a story is put in place, a clock starts ticking.

Saliha: I had been thinking about something different. I have long wrestled with the question of flirting. Born in a culture where women are treated as sexual objects, I learned to never flirt as it can be quite dangerous. Over time, my story became "I'm not sexy" which lately had started to create a sense of tension for me.

While putting away groceries, Mark and Saliha pick up the thread of ongoing themes about safety and connection, about the impact of being acknowledged, of warmth. Ideas and life stories that used to fit perfectly are now tugging slightly at them. In the intersection of those tensions, something new is emerging.

They had talked about Saliha's story about not flirting before, but something a little different came up for Mark, today.

Mark: I see you as being quite warm and open to people, Saliha. Maybe that is flirting? Being a little playful? You seem very warm to everyone, and that warmth is powerful. It has certainly changed my life.

Saliha considered the idea, and it struck her: *Being warm with people in public spaces does make me feel alive, but the fear of it being sexualized has kept me hidden.* And suddenly, she felt a rising sense of joy: *Perhaps the world had not stolen that playful way of connecting from me after all.*

In the same conversation, Mark realized that perhaps what he had appreciated in Saliha a decade before was warmth towards everyone, not just towards himself. That Saliha's warmth had not only validated him, but encouraged a whole community of connection.

Mark: *In an instant, my story shifted. Ten years before I had not marked Saliha's warmth toward the world. I realize that was "the something" that is not to be taken lightly.*

In just ten minutes of back and forth, while putting away the groceries, we human beings have the power to become someone new. And, we feel a renewed connection with each other. Understanding how to be in connection to self, other, culture, and our environment is relational intelligence. One of the core ideas of relational intelligence is that we define a relationship as a space instead of a thing; a dynamic space in which who we are, is forever emerging.

If we enter a relationship thinking we already know what an entire relationship needs to be, it's a recipe for atrophy and stasis. What if, instead, couples fully expected to get married again every few years, meet this new person, state their vows anew, because that's how quickly we are changing and growing.

For better or for worse, we are constantly co-creating, in our relationships, who we are becoming. This holds true for children and parents, brothers and sisters, spouses, friends, co-workers and so on. We are becoming who we will become next, minute by minute, in the back and forth of relating. Even relationships, long gone, continue to form who we are. A grandparent no longer living continues to inform who we are becoming as we change, and then reconsider what we experienced with them from a new perspective.

Acknowledging and supporting a constant process of growth and change in others, even when it threatens to shift our own constructions of life, is what unconditional love looks like. It's what emergence requires of us all.

Which brings us back to the stories we put in place *and the clock ticking*. When we seek a false sense of safety or predictability by trying to keep our partners physically, sexually, emotionally, professionally, socially frozen in our story, it creates ever increasing tension between our need for predictability and the actual "truth" of our evolving humanity.

Our partner will change, evolve, while we remain fixated on our story for them; a story that becomes more and more restrictive as they continue to grow and change. When we cling to our limiting stories about others, whether we fear change, or relating, or our own insecurities, the growing tension between our need to keep things constant, and our partner's becoming who they are becoming, eventually will break the lingering connection.

We look up one day, and the story we are fixated on, the story of who and where our partner, friend or child was before, is over. They have moved on, walked away over the hill and are gone from sight. What could have been a rich conversation about discovery and change, walking together, didn't happen.

Understanding just how vast the human potential for daily and hourly change is, isn't a threat to us. It is our generative state of being and becoming. We can see such an endless universe in our partners. There is so much possibility, excitement, reward and hope. It is here that the richness of life resides.

And sometimes, flirting.

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For more on Mark and Saliha's diversity and inclusion work, visit [RemakingManhood.com](#) On Twitter, find Mark [@RemakingManhood](#) and Saliha [@ThinkPlay](#).

