

2000: Getting Cozy

Larry and I met when we were both thirty-seven years old. My age was important to me because I had dreamed of meeting a special partner since I was twelve years old. I had pushed to make it happen, but it never had. By my mid-thirties, I felt that life had forgotten me, that I'd never experience the joy of intimacy between lovers. By the time I met Larry, I'd already stopped pushing. I figured if it was meant to be, it would just happen. I stopped hoping "he" would turn up behind every corner. I'd always left room in my life for a lover, but I'd never set aside enough room in my life for me. *Love the one you're with*, I told myself. So, I sought the courage to live in peace with myself.

My inner voice told me to leave the city and move to the country. I quit my job as a junior high school teacher in East L.A. and moved to a small 9,000 people in the wine country of Northern California. I'd never lived in a farming town. I'd never had a pet. I'd never witnessed the changing of the seasons. This was, as my father used to say, "A chance to kill a never."

Following my dream of living in the country didn't mean that I gave up my dream of finding Mr. Right. It just superseded it. It meant putting myself first.

I was always attracted to foreign men, the sort of man I was more likely to meet in L.A. or another big city. I'd always hoped to be partnered with an exotic man, someone who spoke with a foreign accent, someone whose skin, hair and eyes spoke of lands I'd only visited or hoped to visit. When I met Larry, I was attracted to his olive skin and large, dramatic, organ-grinder style mustache. But I was disappointed when I found out he was Jewish, like me. I didn't think that made him exotic at all. I tried not to be prejudiced, least of all against someone from my own culture, but I admit that some of the ideals I was looking for in a man had to be discarded. Later, I was very happy to discover just how much Larry and I had in common culturally.

We met at a gay men's spiritual retreat on February 16, 1990, two days after Valentine's Day. The retreat was in a secluded part of the redwood forests along the Russian River. There were about 25 men, all strangers to me, who met for a three-day weekend in a beautiful Victorian mansion.

The best part of being in seclusion with those gay men was the opportunity to watch Larry as he socialized with them. There were so many questions I didn't have to ask him; his behavior in public spoke for him. Although we spent time alone, the time we spent sharing community told me a lot. I remember in high school watching the boys and girls socialize freely together. I missed it then. I watched Larry carefully that weekend. I noticed whom he spoke to, what he laughed at, what he ate and drank. I learned a lot about him indirectly.

The second night of the weekend, the group got together in a circle. Each person was instructed to give himself a Native American name. My heart sank. I hate doing things like that. I looked back at the door, but I didn't see a graceful way out of the room. I know I would have been just as uncomfortable if the assignment had been for each of us to give himself a Hasidic name. I felt that they were toying with another people's culture.

When it was Larry's turn to give himself an Indian name, he just turned to the group and said, "I'm Larry Wisch, Urban Dweller." Everybody laughed, and I think I fell in love with him on the spot. I saw he had a sense of humor and that he could use it to get himself out of an uncomfortable situation. Larry never met a stranger. He's curious; he asks

questions, a rare virtue in most social circles. He'll talk to anyone without seeming to worry about being judged; he's too busy enjoying being himself.

Larry found me attractive in part because of how I was carrying myself through a problem I was having at that time. I had found a job teaching in a rural junior high school, but my students started to suspect that I was gay and began to taunt me. Rather than hide my sexuality or lie, I decided to come out to my students. The administration, teachers and parents rose to the "threat" overnight. Parents pulled their children out of my classes; teachers stopped talking to me in the lunchroom, and the administration started to "monitor" my classes in an effort to find reasons not to hire me the following year. Larry admired me for the way in which I walked through that challenge. He found me attractive, not just good-looking.

We didn't sleep together on the first night in bed together. We waited until the second night. I was staying in a cabin outside the main house, and it was so cold that I couldn't sleep at all the first night. So, Larry invited me to sleep with him on his twin-sized bed. I was warm, but we were chaperoned the whole night by his roommate, so the climate was close but not intimate.

We got to know each other better and better over the next few months and realized that we wanted to become soul mates - to share some things, to divide others. We wanted to witness the integrity and love of each other's spiritual path, to forgive and accept in each other's presence. We didn't meet a moment too soon or too late. If we had met 37 years later, it would have been just as sweet.