

# *Living Leather*

*Presented by Tomo*

In Leather We Trust 2.0

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Greetings and thank you to the producers of In Leather We Trust for asking me to speak today. It's important to me to begin my words with a land acknowledgement. I am speaking to you as an uninvited guest on the land of the Miwok people, on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada mountains in Northern California between Sacramento and Lake Tahoe.

I was asked to talk to you about Leather as a lifestyle and culture and I am happy to do so because Leather is how I live my life.

I realize that is an expansive statement. To understand what I mean, let's start with how I found leather, BDSM, and authority exchange.

I arrived in Corpus Christi Texas as a monogamous vanilla lesbian from Long Island, New York. The trip was to meet with the out-going treasurer of a women's martial arts organization, who's position I was about to fill. Little did I know how much this meeting would change my life. While at her home, I noticed what I thought was exercise equipment on her wall was actually hard points with chain attached and floggers hanging nearby. This was the weekend I met my wife, Mel.

That was 26 years ago.

She introduced me to her local leather club, The Corpus Christi Motorcycle Club and the Texas Conference of Clubs. My first leather event was called Sex on the Beach held at their home men's leather bar, the Hidden Door.

Since that time, I've done a few things. I started by finding the leather community in New York through the Lesbian Sex Mafia and The Eulenspiegel Society, among other dungeons and private play parties. I became involved in the Pittsburgh community as well where I was in a relationship with a dominant for 12 years.

Finding uniforms hot and there not being an organization at the time that welcomed women or trans people, along with my wife and 2 friends, I founded the Dyke Uniform Corps. From there, I found the M/s Community, learned about myself as both a Dominant and a slave, and have served my community as an event producer, titleholder, teacher, mentor, keynote speaker and emcee ever since.

Ten years ago, Mel and I left NY and moved to Northern California and live on the side of a mountain in a pine forest... and I continue to do all the things. I feel so lucky in my life to be surrounded with love from Mel, my boy levi, and a year ago, I fell crazy in love with my lover and Dominant, Eleven.

When I was asked to offer my thoughts to you about the importance of leather lifestyle and culture, I first spent time thinking about my roots in leather and what has grown from those roots to create what leather has come to mean to me as well as who I am as a leather person.

What IS leather lifestyle and culture?

I can't and won't speak to what leather might mean to you nor will you hear me say what leather should be or what I believe is a universal truth. I do believe there are common beliefs, values, practices and customs in many cultures including leather culture, and also individual variance within. However, I can only speak for myself, my life experience, and how I choose to live.

We've heard the terms leather fetish, wearing leather, earning leathers. I'd like to talk about LIVING LEATHER. Leather is not just a fabric I choose to wear on my body. It is not just sex and play in the dungeon. It is not a just set of protocols such as where to walk or the manner in which I serve my dominant's tea (which btw is critical in my world these days).

Leather is who I am. Leather is the way that I choose to live.

What does that mean to me? As I reflected on this question, I was able to identify several aspects of leather community that are vital to my life.

## **Service**

The first and probably most important to me when I think about leather community is service.

As you can see from the personal history that I shared, I believe in serving my community. Whether it's to support a friend in the leather community who is in need, donating my time to produce events and create spaces for people to gather, entertain on stage or educate – I lead with giving TO my community without expectation and without keeping score.

It's not that I am a service-oriented person. I am actually much more inspired by control on both sides of the slash. When I think of leather community though, service to each other and service to community is what I believe to be our backbone. it's the foundation, it's the structure,

There is a type of commitment I feel in leatherfolk when we stand beside each other, when we show up in need, to be as strong and resilient as leather is as a fabric. Yet leather needs care. Leather needs cleaning and conditioning. Our community is cared for by the service, support, and love that we provide to each other.

## **Authority Exchange**

Authority Exchange is the aspect of leather, kink, and BDSM that feeds me most. I realized early on that my kink is in power and the exchange of authority between

humans. It is how I connect. It is how I find sexual pleasure. It is where pain is lives. Dominance and surrender are what fills my heart and inspires my soul. And... it is from both sides of the slash.

The moment when I kneel before my Dominant, my eyes drop, my breath slows and I feel her power and command is both my most peaceful place and my most excited place – all at the same time.

The moment when my boy in tears tells me he needs my pain though he has already taken so much for me.

Those moments are leather.

### **Integrity, Accountability and Bearing**

I believe in, I value, and I live my life as a leather person with integrity, accountability, and bearing. I don't just talk, I walk this walk. Whether it is an event I am producing, my relationships, conflict resolution, changes in life – all aspects of who I am reflect my values. Integrity means that when I say I will do something, I do it. When I give my word, it is something you can count on.

I hold myself accountable and own my mistakes and in the midst of the storm, I am calm and keep my bearing. Am I perfect... no way. I make plenty of mistakes. We are all imperfect. I believe the key is how you handle yourself during your misstep. I strive to do this well.

I encourage us to engage in our life and in our community with integrity, accountability, and bearing and expect that from each other. You can expect it from me.

### **Diversity, Social and Racial Justice**

People in our community are hurting.

People in our community are oppressed.

People in our leather community are silenced and excluded.

There are platforms and opportunities that only some have.

My eyes are open and I cannot un-see it.

I will not stand for injustice in our leather community.

I will not be silent.

I am and will continue doing something about it.

I invite you to join me in doing the work in our community for equality, accessibility and justice.

I accept my responsibility as a leader in this community to take action to promote diversity, accessibility and justice and to speak up when I don't see it.

A word to speaking up though. I believe in CALL-IN not CALL-OUT. I believe in communicating with each other (which mostly involves listening) and finding our way. I want to create change as a community. Is that naïve? Maybe.

Finding solutions that don't include burning down community is how I am driven and how I move in the world. We are in our leather community together, so why wouldn't we try to find solutions... together?

Many of you might not know that for most of my life, ever since childhood, I have listened to the music of John Denver for comfort and inspiration. There are words in his song Eagle and Hawk that speak to me in this moment: "hope for the future and all that we can be and not just what we are". This is what I hope for the leather community and our continued work in Diversity, Accessibility, Social and Racial Justice.

Leather community means to me that we are one, we do the work collectively. We ensure opportunity, voice and empowerment for all, leaving no one in our community behind. Mutually we as a leather community do the work and WE lead the way.

### **Representation.**

Leather community is about representation. People often ask why we have contests. As a person who has produced many contests over the years and as a titleholder, I happen to have an answer!

Leather community means that I have representation to be the dirty, greedy, hungry, kinky person that I am. I have all of you to stand next to me and say yes – we can be sexual deviants, yes, this is okay, yes I am okay.

People that stand on contest stages, often called beauty pageant contestants, are so much more than that. They put themselves out there publicly, they stand up, they speak out, they are vulnerable, they are brave, and they do it to represent our communities. I value the titleholders, educators, producers, speakers, volunteers, attendees and all who stand up and represent the way we live in leather community.

## **Community**

I've learned a lot about what the word community means in the last year. Last October, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. My family first and foremost held me strong during treatment and recovery.

So did my leather community. They called themselves "Tomo's Leather Army" and let me tell you, I don't know how I would have made it through the hard days without the support I received.

The very last day of chemo, I sat in the chair with the IV in my arm in tears from all the FB messages holding me close, so many pictures of people in leathers sending me strength. I have heard and used the words leather community for many years - but living through that experience, seeing how all of you held me - now, I have felt it, I have lived it, and thank you.

## **Hot filthy play and sex**

I saved the best for last. What does leather mean... let's go back to the raw root of it all – SEX, DIRTY, FLITHY, PAIN, POWER, SURRENDER, HOT.

My life as a leather person has changed a lot in the last 25+ years and I will say, at this point on the ride, I am having some of the hottest BDSM and sex yet!

I felt for a while there like I was an employee of the leather community – just doing the work. Not really participating, not doing it, not enjoying it. Not anymore!

A few weeks ago, we had a party at our ranch and a bunch of queer leather folk gathered in our dungeon. Eleven had my wrists bound to a hard point over my head in the middle of the room and whipped me with her single tail as others were playing at stations all around us. It was intoxicating. Our intimate energy in the center of a circle with spiraling energy from the others playing with us and around us was magic.

In doing all the service, in doing all the work, I have at times lost touch with the magic. Sometimes, I think I need to take a moment and take the stick out of my ass and use it to beat my boy, or hand it to my Dominant and beg her to beat me. While I will continue to do the work in service to my community, I am now focused on being an actual participant, not just a worker.

**Leather community** is so important in my life. You might say it IS my life. It is vital to me to live it, engage in my community, support it, grow it, nurture it and fill it with my energy. I am fulfilled by passing on information about leather culture, practices, BDSM skills, and how to live in relationships that exchange authority. I believe that passing on our knowledge is necessary for our community to endure and to thrive.

We grieve ending of relationships, hardship and loss together. We celebrate new relationships together, we come together in joy and in sorrow. We hold each other in community.

Leather is simply not a fetish for me. It is my life. It is my lifestyle. It is my culture. **You** are my people.

It is my hope that some of my stories may be inspirational or thought provoking for you, or at the very least bring a few laughs. I can't define leather or leather community is for you or in a 15-minute speech cover all that it might mean. I can only share with you what it is and means in my life. In the end, leather is what you define it to be.

Leather community is what you believe it to be. It is what you create, how you engage, how you serve, how you choose to live it. I hope that while embracing this incredible community, you will find what LIVING LEATHER means to you and I wish you magnificent adventures in your exploration. Thank you.