

# Leather Reign Sunday Brunch Keynote by tomo

**November 15, 2015**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Good morning. Before I begin, I would like to thank my Master Ms Rhonda for allowing me to speak here this morning, and the Producers of Leather Reign for this opportunity.

My thoughts today will be about my personal journey as a leather person and as a slave during which I will talk about both the challenges and successes, with an objective of encouraging others on their path. I will speak about how I found myself as a slave and the exploration of why is it right for me. My story reflects my personal struggle with the monoculture of M/s that we are fed, my awakened awareness of the importance of finding one's true self and the value of diversity in a community. It is my hope that it will be both inspirational and entertaining.

## **MY BEGINNING - TEXAS AND NEW YORK**

My introduction to leather started in South Texas in the early 90's. I had agreed to take a position on the board of directors of a martial arts organization, and they flew me to Corpus Christi to meet with the board's Treasurer, whom I was replacing. Little did I know that the woman I was meeting would become my partner – and 21 years later, Mel and I are still together.

At one point during the weekend, she had lured me into her bedroom to “*see the archives of the organization*” and out of the corner of my eye, I noticed some strange stuff on the wall. I had thought it was that pulley type exercise equipment that was popular back then. While she was out walking her dogs, I snuck in and took a closer look. I almost fainted when I realized it was actually eyebolts and chain – and were those things whips????!!! I said nothing to her and did NOT go back into her bedroom the rest of the trip.

When I got back to NY, Mel asked me on the phone what I thought of her bedroom wall – which she said she KNEW I saw. Well, that was that... from there she encouraged me to do a lot of reading, find the local NY leather scene, and I started dating her!

To begin my search, I embarrassingly first found the America Online leatherdykes chatroom. I was obsessed. I remember being so impatient as that stupid modem tone informed me that my computer was trying to connect. Funny though, 20 years later, I still have friendships with people I “met” in that room. From that group, I found TES and the Lesbian Sex Mafia, and spent many a night at the local leather spaces in NY at that time.

I also began flying quite a bit back and forth to Corpus. Mel was very involved in the leather scene there and was only the second female member of the Corpus Christi Motorcycle Club, which was a part of the Texas Conference of Clubs. It was there that I attended my very first leather event, the annual club run called Sex on the Beach held at the men’s leather bar. During the run, they had a large smoker going with Texas smoked brisket. Not only did I pop my leather cherry that weekend, I suddenly was no longer a vegetarian!

Mel and I had a very hot start to life together. Sex and wax and canes and floggers and single tails... I can remember being up most of the night, then catching a 6am flight back to New York. Oh to be young... she introduced me to leather, taught me everything I knew, and wow did we have fun. We fell in love and within a year, Mel moved to New York.

There was so much energy and new information. I had no idea who I was as a Leather Person, Top, bottom, masochist, sadist, Dominant, submissive..all of the above? I wondered what exactly IS a leather person? And did I hear that correctly... one could be a slave?

## **PITTSBURGH**

As my relationship with Mel progressed, we realized that we were not a total match as leather partners. She was much more into BDSM and I knew on that what I needed in my life was authority exchange. Being committed to each other, we chose to examine how the conditions of our poly relationship had changed and how we could continue to grow together to be our full selves. Once again, in an online chat room, I found a Dominant in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and began what ended up being a 12 year D/s relationship, most of which was 24/7.

I was still trying to figure out who I was. I didn’t know much about D/s at the time, and I thought I had two choices... boy or girl. That was an easy choice, or was it? I chose boy and started to use male pronouns. Though saying boy felt more comfortable for me than girl, neither fit well. As a boy, many people interacted with me as if I still had to grow up, to which I did not respond well. Other boys wanted to play with me. I never really understood that either.

I also did not ever feel right using male pronouns. Truthfully neither male nor female has ever felt like a fit for me. Gender, for me, is not one of two points. I prefer my gender to be butch, which is a fluctuating location along a gender line, not any one single point at either end. Though I knew I was drawn to service and surrender, finding a word for it at this point in my life was confusing and frustrating.

### **D.U.C.**

A fetish that I realized I was drawn to was the wearing of Military uniforms. I had met two friends in Pittsburgh who were also drawn to military, discipline, and uniforms. We felt strongly that there was a need for a uniform corps that welcomed women. Using our non-profit board experience in the martial arts community, Mel and I joined together with our Pittsburgh friends and we founded the Dyke Uniform Corps, which 17 years later is still going strong with members from across the United States and Canada.

As far back as I can remember, I was drawn to the military. I remember my mother telling me that at three years old, I had come into possession of an enlisted US Navy dixie cup cover. This is the round white canvas hat that got its nickname due to looking like a common Dixie paper drinking cup. As a young child in a traditional Italian household, I was raised believe it or not, with very long hair, even at that young age. Apparently, I found a pair of scissors and cut off most of my hair. When my mother asked why I did that, I replied “so it looks right with the hat, Mom”.

It was not okay to have short hair in my youth, no less to be a dyke and did I mention leatherdyke and wearing uniforms? It was a distant departure from my childhood, but I felt more comfortable with my short cropped hair, in my new uniforms and in my leather, than I ever had before. I was beginning to feel like I had a place in this community.

### **M/s**

About 9 years into the D/s relationship in Pittsburgh, the Dominant I belonged to met and committed to a peer partner. She was the first person I had ever met who identified as a Master, and it was through her that I learned about the Master slave community, and realized who I truly was...

A slave was not particularly something I had considered before then. Ownership? Being owned? Somebody else having authority over everything? And what about Mel? How can I be a slave and have a peer partner? No way I thought, that does not work in my world. But then somehow, it just happened. Something shifted and a place deep inside of me was touched that I hadn't realized existed.

I had not known until I was presented with an opportunity to truly surrender my will to this Master that something had been lacking in my life. The challenge to surrender fully reached me deep to my core and inspired me in a way nothing else ever had. That relationship lasted just under 3 years, however it was where I first realized who I am. I left with this new slave inside of me and began to try and figure out what to do with this discovery, the cravings I had and drive that was awakened. It was a turbulent time for me emotionally.

I also tried to figure out what slave meant to me and how it would apply to my life. I will admit, I had this picture of a doormat at the time and I knew that was not me. How did I, this powerful dominant, leader, and teacher fit with this new slave inside of me. I struggled to find role models in the community that looked like me. The picture that I was often presented of what a slave was supposed to look like was counter-productive to my acceptance of self and discovering of who I might be as a slave. It created for me a yearning for diversity. I wondered if I could possibly find a Master who would accept me as my authentic self.

## **IMSL AND MA'AM**

As I pondered these thoughts, I reached out to the Master slave community for knowledge and support and looked for ways to fill my time. As often happens with breakups, I had a lot of extra hours on my hands and I needed to find something to fill the emptiness and distract me from my wounds.

I joined the staff of International Ms Leather Weekend as a Producer and while producing IMsL for 7 years, met my Master, Ms Rhonda. She was initially on the IMsL staff as Director of Marketing and within a year, also became a Producer. We still joke about the fact that when I started as a Producer of IMsL, her position reported to me - that did NOT go well – for either of us.

I continued to work on self-development and discovery, trying to figure out who I was as a slave, as Ms Rhonda and I developed our relationship. I have always celebrated diversity and have never believed that there was any ONE way to do anything. I applied this concept to what it might mean for me to be a slave. I knew two things which I used as a starting point from which to find my way. I knew that I needed to surrender to a Master who had requirements that I was able to meet, and I knew that I needed to be ME as a slave - my full authentic self - a dominant, a leader, a powerful devoted servant, a Samurai....

Then I realized - that is exactly it.

## **SLAVE AS SAMURAI**

I have trained in Japanese martial arts for over 30 years. I have always been drawn to the military and when I began in the martial arts realized that Japanese Warrior-ship was my true calling. When I started in the leather community, I remember people saying to me “you just get it” with regard to manners and protocol. Well actually, I did not just get it, I had already been doing it for 10 years prior in a Japanese based hierarchical culture. In my martial arts system, the moment I begin to speak, my students immediately drop to a knee to listen. When my teacher spoke, I did the same. The traditional art that we practice is deep with deference, respect, devotion, and protocol.

The word Samurai means one who serves the noble class. Samurai live by the code often called Bushido, *bushi* meaning warrior and *do* meaning way. The way of the Samurai was one of honor, duty and loyalty to one’s Master until death. The code of Bushido varies among historical writing however it is known to include respect, sincerity, justice, bravery, self-control, politeness, honor, and loyalty. Though the definitions of the words vary slightly, the overall message regarding a suggested way to live your life is clear.

This is the way in which I have tried to live and what I taught my students as a means to move through the world in a respectful way with deep moral principles. Certainly this is not Japan and this is the year 2015, however this way of living has always made the most sense to me. After sitting with these thoughts and opening my mind and heart to my discovery, I finally understood how I fit in the Master slave community, as a Samurai – as a slave.

## **MA’AM AND HER SAMURAI**

My Master helped me to understand and accept who I am as a slave, as her Samurai, and not to try to be what I may have thought the community expected. I learned that I do not have to be something or someone by community definition. My Master values the principles that a Samurai style of life prescribed. She guided me and encouraged me to develop as her powerful Samurai slave, devoted to my Master and Owner. I am her slave, I am her property, I am her servant – fiercely devoted and obedient to her will, her path, her protection and her honor.

As her Samurai, I live in a layered poly hierarchy. I serve my Master in many ways both personally and within our community as an educator, speaker, event producer, and now titleholder.

This hierarchical leather family includes my peer partner Mel. Despite what seems to be an unwritten rule that slaves are not supposed to have peer partners, my Master accepts that I came with one. She says that “tomo came to me with a Mel and two dogs.” I am a person of deep commitment and loyalty. I made a life commitment to Mel and I would not selfishly break that commitment just because years into our relationship, I realized that I was a slave. The key for me was that I met a Master who would accept me as her slave, as my genuine self, and with “a mel”.

When Ms Rhonda and I had first discussed what our life might look like as Master and slave she explained to me that the key was for Master and slave to match. She told me that I was able to surrender what she wanted to control and that was the significant piece. She accepted me as her slave and I am grateful to be owned by her.

Often, I am tasked with the position of middle management, responsible for the service of others. Our poly hierarchy also includes two servants, whom it is my responsibility to manage, support, and guide. One of those servants is my Master's girl pixie and the second is levi, who with my Master's blessing, is my boy.

## **DIVERSITY**

As I travelled on this journey of discovery, I sat with myself to first learn who I was. That did not happen overnight. It took mindful self-examination on my part to figure out how I would move in the world as a leather person and as a slave. I took my experiences from my early years in the gay male leather community, the NY leather and M/s communities, my connection to military, and the influence of my decades in Japanese arts – did a lot of thinking – and with the guidance of my Master, found *me*.

I am certain I am not the slave for everybody. I am just as certain that I am the slave for my Master, and truthfully, that's what matters. We as members of the leather and M/s communities are diverse. Diversity is our strength, not our weakness. In a world where we are largely not accepted, should we not accept each other even when we don't look exactly alike? I think yes.

I encourage each of us to take the time to look at our life experiences and who we are deep inside... and once you have that information - LIVE IT.

Don't apologize for it – LIVE IT.

When we come across a person who does not look exactly like us, I urge us all to ask them about who they are and how they got there. Celebrate their personal journey and accept each of us as individuals in this community.

I'd like to share a quote with you:

*“A samurai style relationship in SM would be one based primarily on honor, loyalty and respect. The attempt here is to encourage consideration of a Samurai style of Relationship as an alternative to the usual Master/slave, Owner/owned pairings”*

One might think those were my words, but they are not. That quote was taken from an article written two decades ago by Laura Antoniou.

Laura is a long-time member of the leather community, an author, a speaker, and is most famous for writing The Marketplace Series. She presented a picture of what hierarchy could be outside of the typical view and her words certainly ring true for me. Long before I knew who I was, she was writing about the very type of slave I have realized that I am.

Through my journey of self-discovery, I have learned that there is a place for each of us, there is a place for **me**. This place lives in my heart and is visible by my devotion to my Master and to my community.

Thank you.