

2019 GWNN Bash Keynote

July 28, 2019

Ms Rhonda and Tomo

“Pushing the Envelope”

(blue – Ms Rhonda, black Tomo)

Introduction

Good morning. Our thanks to the Producers for inviting us. We are honored to be here and share with you. Our last visit to Austin was during our title year as International Master and slave in 2016, and we are thrilled to be back.

Not many people know this, but Texas, Corpus Christi in particular was where I found leather community. I learned about leather, poly, and stopped being a vegetarian all in one weekend, thanks to a hot leather dyke and Texas brisket. Then, a few years back at Octroperfest, I found myself in Austin eating chicken fried steak for the first. Odd things always seem to happen when I come to South Texas. Thanks for having us back.

The producers asked us to relate our talk this morning to the event's theme - "Pushing the Envelope" - that as we are true to our own self-expression and awareness, change and growth occur. This topic really struck home for us. During our 10 plus years together, we have changed and grown tremendously through self-reflection, communication, and commitment to our relationship, rather than either of us, being the winner when there is conflict. We have a few stories to share that speak to this growth, and if you've heard us speak before, you know there's probably a little laughter along the way too.

The Beginning

I was on a journey of personal growth before I met tomo. I became the Marketing Director for International Ms Leather/International Ms Bootblack as a way to ease myself back into the community after a year away from the public scene. I needed a job in order to be comfortable attending an event alone, and my IMsL staff position fit the bill.

During my 2nd year on the IMsL staff, I learned that the producer I reported to had decided to step away from the event. I understood his reasoning, but I was still disappointed that we would no longer be working together.

When the IMsL owner announced that tomo would be joining us as the new producer, the news was not well received. None of us knew this tomo person, and we did not make it easy for her. Then something shifted... during a staff conference call, tomo and I started flirting... and the next day we talked for 8 hours. Within a week I had a plane ticket, and exactly one month from the day we started flirting, I was in NY to meet her.

While the beginning was incredibly hot, it was a challenge to start a relationship across 3000 miles.

- Conflict and difficulties over distance
- Communication challenge
- 3 hour time difference

Jet blue 161 and 162, reality of full-time job/time off.

I also had no business being in a relationship at the time. I had just come out of a 12 year relationship and simultaneous 3 year relationship with a couple that I belonged to. I call it the poly implosion heard around the world. I was a broken slave at that point in my life and that added to the difficulty of the timing of our meeting.

But...you meet when you meet and if it is meant to be, it is meant to be.

Prior to meeting tomo, I did not think I could have the relationship structure I really wanted. I had always been in hierarchical relationships with butches who didn't want anyone to know that the Femme was on the left side of the slash for fear they would lose their butch card. I actually accepted a partner's collar and for a short time publicly identified as his slave. Only a few people very close to us realized that in fact the boy had collared the Ma'am. After meeting Tomo, I realized that I could live openly and

authentically in a hierarchical relationship. And good luck to anyone who tries to take Tomo's butch card.

While it was new and exciting, it was also a very challenging time for both of us. The combination of my learning about leadership as a Master and Tomo's need for healing required us to be generous with each other with our compassion and communication, while continuing to work on our personal development. It all sounds pretty in this speech but, there were painful moments we went through individually and together as we supported each other's growth as our authentic selves.

Ms Rhonda was also the first Femme I had been in a relationship with, no less the first Femme Master. Once, early on in our relationship, about 6 months in, we were travelling to Washington DC from New York – I was teaching at Master slave Conference. I had a little red two seater sports car at the time. We don't pack light. We each had large suitcases and Ma'am had a second suitcase with just her shoes. I packed the car and came back into the house to let Ma'am know we were ready to leave. She said "that's amazing Tomo, how did you fit everything?" I replied "Oh, it was no problem, you know that suitcase of shoes? Well, I emptied it and just fit in the shoes wherever I could shove them – under the seats, around the suitcases in the truck, even in the cup holders." It is amazing I stand here on this stage still alive.

I had a lot to learn.

The Early Years

As we developed our hierarchical relationship, I supported tomo as she healed, learned to recognize and manage buttons from her childhood and past relationships. I helped her

realize that she could be MY slave AND her full self. I wanted the whole person - producer, martial artist, uniform fetishist, and powerful dominant with a boy of her own.

I helped Ms Rhonda become the Master she wanted to be by supporting her growth and discovery. I reached out to experienced Masters I was friends with from the M/s community on the east coast for her to connect with for discussion and exchange of reference materials. Most of all, I was patient...some of the time.

Ma'am took a lot of steps to be sure I was safe and help me. We were teaching at a MAsT meeting years ago, the class was on contracts. Ma'am said that early in our relationship, we built layers of authority exchange and at one point, it was 24/6 – Tomo has Wednesdays off. I was so embarrassed by that during that meeting and said, that's not possible Ma'am really? She said oh yes, reached into her bag, and being an attorney, pulled out a copy of that very contract so I could see on paper that Tomo had Wednesday's off. She was incredible and generous with me as I healed and she helped me find my way back to surrender.

Life in CA

Moving: As we continued to grow – personally and in our dynamic – we realized that for our authority exchange relationship to work long term we could not be 3000 miles apart.

I began to talk about moving to NY. It seemed like the easiest solution – tomo and Mel each had high power corporate jobs in NY as well as the two businesses they owned together. And it was just me in CA, self-employed.

As we talked more about it, however, it became clear that it wasn't just about me being in CA. I realized that I could not leave CA until my granddaughter was old enough to fly to NY

unaccompanied... and that would be quite a few more years. So it seemed like we were in a holding pattern.

I didn't really give it anymore thought... I was just marking time. Then Tomo came to me and said that she realized she was the one who needed to move... that we needed to be in CA for our relationship to flourish as Master and slave.

And she was right. Personally, I would have struggled in the fast-paced, impersonal east coast environment. And I would have been swallowed up by the gigantic world Mel and Tomo had built for themselves.

Ma'am and I were wine tasting in Northern California and I said what a beautiful area I cannot afford. She convinced me that I could afford this area and we emailed Mel back in NY. Mel replied bid 350 – a woman of many words. We didn't bit that that started the process of looking for a house and being that we were not in a hurry, we were looking for a bargain. We purchased our home on a real estate auction (not recommended!) and I actually purchased it site unseen. Who would I trust more than Mel and Ma'am.

2 years later the move happened and I never looked back.

The Title Years

Representing our community as NWMs 2015 and IMs2016 was definitely “Pushing the Envelope” for us. Over the years we'd been together, I was asked when we would run for the NW title by a variety of people. Only one of us is an extrovert and it's NOT the one who makes the decisions, so my answer was always some version of “No, thank you.”

I was pop question challenged, s I knew contests were not for me. Yes, I had heard “just say the first ting that comes into your mind.” The problem was NOTHING came ot my mind.

Tomo thought running for a title would be fun and was sure that I just needed a little practice. So, she had Levi asking me pop questions on the way home from Southplains one year and I finally gave in.

We believe strongly in representation and in the Ms title system. We believe in standing up for our community and want to see people as leaders who look like us.

We also wanted to challenge our community to allow, recognize, and respect each person’s true self as Master and slave.

For us this meant:

- Master as a Femme and butch/male privilege, assumptions
- That slaves can be powerful, outgoing, successful, etc

As we move through our community, when we speak, when we teach classes – we don’t sugar coat our life. We share about the joy and the challenges. We talk about how we have grown and where we still need growth both individually and as a pair. We don’t hide who we are.

Before, during and after our title years - and as we stand on this stage today, we are here as representatives of our community in our real skin – as our authentic selves.

Life today...

- We are busy and committed to our community as speakers, educators, and event owners and producers, and this work fulfills us both.
- We enjoy working as a team on these projects and it is one of the ways we match up really well.
- Pulls of family, chosen family, leather community, poly, martial arts, employment obligations – all part of life and since we are doing life, all part of our M/s life together.

Continue to work to find our way together as we both change and grow as humans and life happens – producing an event as M/s, grandchildren!

- We each walk our own path as we walk a path together.
- We have deep respect for each other and our relationship
- Our devotion to each other is our strength and support of each other as our full selves

Closing

Self-awareness and communication of those insights is imperative to a strong relationship: with yourself, with your partners, and with your community. We both work hard at figuring out our buttons, needs, what causes us struggle, and what brings us joy, and sharing that with each other.

I know that I benefit from hearing about struggle and growth from others. Sometimes, it is comforting to me to hear that I am not the only one. It is insightful for me to hear about how others have succeeded and grown from challenges in their life and often leads to me having new insights about myself.

Thank you again for being here with us this morning. We hope that sharing some of our stories about struggle and growth as we strive to live our life as our authentic selves was helpful for you to hear or at the very least...entertaining!