

## A Tale of Two Aliens: Personal and Salon Updates



A man-made waterfall in Banner Elk, NC



Grace and harmony:  
Man and the environment

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Greetings family! This issue of Au Naturel is a bit tardy because I was on a week-long, peaceful retreat in the NC Mountains. In celebration of our 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, we took a trek to Beech Mountain, NC--the highest incorporated town east of the Mississippi (one mile high). I invited my Mom to accompany us as the cabin sleeps six. I had no idea that she had never stayed in the mountains, though born and bred in NC! She was so excited!! That was the greatest unexpected gift that I could imagine. We had a wonderful retreat! With zero wifi or television, it was frankly a blessing to be in silent solitude with nature--particularly in light of the fact that we left on July 8<sup>th</sup>. With so much heavy *breaking news* happening in the lowlands, I was honestly happy to be out of touch with the world. The pictures in this issue are photos that I took as we went for quiet sojourns in nature. Now, my phone sucks when it comes to picture taking! And I'm NO Ansel Adams. But despite these constraints, God's mastery manages to still shine through on a select few of these snapshots.

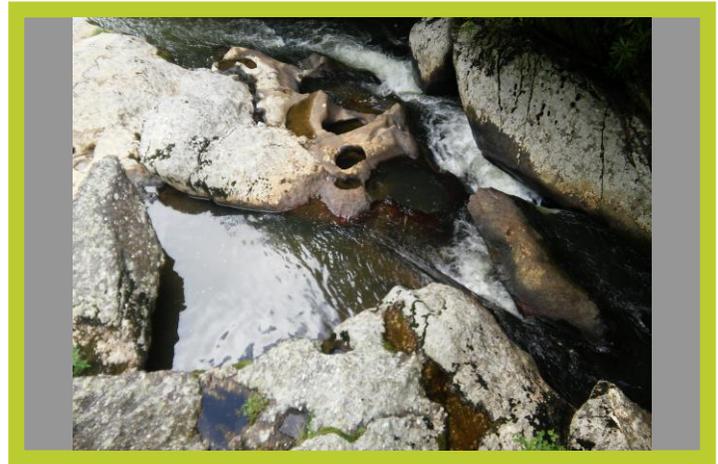
When I told clients in the salon that we would be closed for a week as I would be away celebrating our anniversary, the first thing I always heard was "Congratulations!" I always think "why?" Is it so unusual to be married for 25 years? Isn't that frankly the expectation you have upon entering in wedded union? Why all the accolades when people are simply doing what is expected? Does anyone congratulate you on your birthday? No. They don't! They simply say "Happy birthday!" But such is the reality of modern day life on Earth. I recall the day we got married: July 9<sup>th</sup> 1991. The morning that we woke up, we didn't realize we'd be married by nightfall. It's a pretty funny story really. We were engaged to be married but had not set a date. Because I had been offered a job in Jamaica, I moved there with Lloyd whose University studies were now complete, thus terminating his need for an American visa. He would soon be illegal, so we left the US in June of that same year. Despite the fact that I had permission from the Jamaican consulate in DC to stay in JA for one year, my passport was stamped for two weeks by the immigration officer. What can I say: We were recent college grads and round-trip tickets were cheaper than one-way tickets. So, we paid the round-trip fare expecting never to use the return ticket. When I showed the agent my passport stamp of one year authorization, he showed me my return ticket date. And so, I entered Jamaica with a question mark over my entry. Lloyd said: "Forget him. He's a bureaucrat. (Rule bound!)" So, I went with the flow of the country and relaxed into a "Jamaica no problem" vibe. After two weeks of meeting my new co-workers at [UTech](http://UTech) and frolicking in the sun, I soon realized: "Kingston, we have a problem!" Jamaican immigration officers were harassing Lloyd's Aunt Patsy as to my whereabouts. Her address was my stated in-country residence though I was only there for a few days. ***The immigration officers were looking for me to deport me back to the US!*** (Yes, I was an illegal alien!!! It's fairly easy to be one.) The third time they interrogated her, she told us: "I'm going to give them your address the next time they call." So the next day (July 9<sup>th</sup>), we went to every government office imaginable to define a "hypothetical" problem and to ask how to rectify the situation easily and efficiently. Marriage was the sole solution. I didn't even realize that truth until Lloyd shelled out some cash at a cashier's window and requested a marriage license. He didn't say: "We have to get married now. Do you want to?"

## A Tale of Two Aliens...continued

He just moved forward, and I followed...never questioning or asking anything. (That was my twenty-something year old self...That chic is dead!! ☺) After jumping through a few more administrative hurdles, we arrived at the office of an architect that Lloyd knew casually. He's never been a religious person and would never be comfortable with hypocrisy so, he found a registrar of marriages. When we walked into the man's office to request that he marry us immediately, he conceded. He asked for our paperwork, which Lloyd handed over. Then he asked where our witnesses were. We said: "Witnesses?" and looked at him with confusion. His brow furrowed and he said, "Yes, you need two witnesses to attend the marriage and sign the marriage certificate." So, we walked out to his lobby, saw a man and a woman waiting and asked them if they would be willing to witness our marriage. They looked at each other with surprise and happily agreed. So, we sighed with relief and walked with our witnesses from the lobby back to the man's office. He then began the ceremony. I will never forget the first words that he uttered upon beginning: "The institution of marriage is one that is not to be entered into lightly..." And he continued on. I put my head down hiding the snicker that was trying to escape from my mouth. If I didn't restrain my natural urge, he might refuse to marry us completely. And so, we were married. When I phoned my mother to tell her, she was relieved...not upset. Gracefully.

For the next seven or so years, our wedding anniversary passed without either of us taking note at all! I only remembered when August was approaching as our 1<sup>st</sup> son was born August 19<sup>th</sup> 1992. I would think: Jela-ni's birthday is coming up. What am I going to do for him? Then, I'd remember the month and recall that July was already or just about done and we both forgot our anniversary. So, I'd laughingly break the news to Lloyd and he'd say: "Wow! We forgot again! Happy anniversary!" And that was that. Needless to say, rituals don't mean much to us. I've never yelled at him for forgetting our anniversary, or Valentine's Day or my birthday even. Because honestly, I have done the same. So, how could I act as though it's NOT very easy to do. I guess I'm much like a guy in that vein. I likewise HATE shopping, don't want or expect gifts for any reason (including birthdays) and NEVER go to the hairdresser...because I am one. So when my husband complains about any of my quirks, I'm quick to say, "You're free to choose otherwise, my brother...so be free and know the truth!" That usually pulls a quick hug of acknowledgement from him, and the argument is terminated. Why sweat the small stuff?!

And such is the tale of how immigration laws turned two aliens into life-mates a bit sooner than they had anticipated. Are congratulations in order? I would say, "Yes." Because marriage is NOT easy. I've met a few women over the years who I sensed were jealous of my good fortune in the marriage arena. But I know that they would have never lasted the trials we've faced. And I really don't have time to explain. So, I knowingly shake my head and move on. Life is good. We give thanks for God's grace, learned patience, perseverance and love. Praying for 25 more years of life and love for all achieving this milestone. ☺ Amen.



## Finding the Natural Beauty from Within: A Very Personal Commentary on Men and Natural Hair

I recently saw [this article posted in the Huffington Post](#) regarding the types of undesirable men that women may attract when wearing natural hair. The author defined these men as "fetishizers" as they are attracted to naturalistas primarily because of their hair. I found it interesting as I wouldn't know anything about this current reality. I'm married. Sure, I may get the occasional look while out and about; but, most men these days are reacting to my car more than anything else. I've been letting my husband drive it more these days so he can get a vain ego boost for a change. ☺ Trust, they ain't looking when I'm driving the 13 year old Mazda!! ☺ And I'm cool with that. But, it was interesting to think that 30 years after I started wearing natural hair, men are now seeking out naturalistas--though some for all the wrong reasons. Of course, there are still those many men who ignore you completely when they see natural hair. Some things change while others remain the same. But, I encourage the reader not to pre-judge a man's motives because of his vibe. I know more and more natural sisters who are engaged or married to Caucasian and Asian men. Sometimes what seems like a "fetish" is a raw human attraction to what is uniquely beautiful and different. Be open to explore the possibilities. Everyone's experience will not be the same; because, the soul of each individual is unique and attracts energy accordingly.

In the Jheri Curl era of my day, I attracted two types of men with my natural hair: **African** and **Caribbean**. That's it! And quite enough. I perceived the experience positively because these men were genuine and they accepted me as I am. They weren't trying to "prove" something by dating someone with natural hair. They were simply gravitating to what they were accustomed to...without pretense or excuse. I liked that because I was not going to explain my natural hair choice to anyone! I had advanced too far along my natural hair journey for that. When I stopped straightening my natural hair during my 1st year of college, my American boyfriend was visibly surprised and told me that he did not like my new hairstyle. I simply eyed him with a look that said: "Um. That's too bad 'cause I'm not changing it." Deep inside, I knew from that moment that the relationship would not last. We were different kinds of people; but, it took another year for it to be official. What can I say? He was my first.

My next beau was African as was the next. The former loved my hair, even venturing so far as to shampoo it for me. He had never seen so much natural hair on a Black woman's head and wanted to experience it fully. Sweet...not a fetish! The latter brother was really not my boyfriend. He was my beautiful excursion on the wild side of life. Prior to meeting him, I had been in two very serious relationships that nearly ripped me to shreds. So, I was ready

## Poetically Speaking...

### Old School Vibes *courtesy of the Masters*

I have a funny way of waking in the middle of the night unable to get back to sleep. So, I lie in bed in the dead of night and think, reflect, wonder. At these times, I feel closer to divinity than at any other time of day. Eventually, sleep finds me. When my alarm does sound, I'm typically *knocked out!* But as the first orchestra notes of consciousness strike my being, I sometimes hear the heaven's serenading me with words of love. The song will play in the back of my mind free and clear. If I've not overslept, I will linger in this lyrical oasis and listen. Lately, an old school vibe has piqued the fancy of my angelic deejay. Perhaps the mountains re-awakened this favorite pastime of my maestro. He knows I'm a sucker for a love song. ☺ And since I love to share the love, I'll play for you the latest accompaniment to the soulful melody that is my life (as presented by my maestro), draped in a love poem which captures the essence of my reflective morning vibe. #OldSchoolMemories. Hope you enjoy! ☺

### A Moment's Indulgence

by Master Poet Tagore

*I ask for a moment's indulgence to sit by thy side. The works that I have in hand I will finish afterwards.*

*Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows no rest nor respite, and my work becomes an endless toil in a shoreless sea of toil.*

*Today the summer has come at my window with its sighs and murmurs; and the bees are plying their minstrelsy at the court of the flowering grove.*

*Now it is time to sit quiet, face to face with thee, and to sing dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure.*



for non-commitment. My primary focus was academics! Everything else paled in comparison. I saw him at a college party, thought he was a god, and asked about him. When I learned that he was an 800m Olympic gold medalist, I almost dismissed engaging with him altogether. I figured he must have a swelled head, and I couldn't be bothered. Actually, he is the most humble man I've ever known. When I learned from him that he was already betrothed to an African sister on our campus, I thought: "Good. That means we have no expectations of commitment. I'm down." I knew the sister; but, we were not friends. And frankly, I didn't care. Heartache makes you cold. Besides, I wasn't trying to steal him. He was simply sweet and beautiful, and I wanted only to share his space for a moment. That was all. I told him everything that I could share about myself, my motivations, etc.; he did the same. And we engaged. As a humble spirit, he never said anything about my hair or my appearance. But, he got the cutest smile on his face when I came in his presence which said all that words did not. I felt appreciated. When he phoned me to stay with him the hours before his departure to the 800m World Championship race in Budapest (rather than his betrothed), I was surprised. When I learned he broke the world record, I was so excited for him! Brother was blowing up!! He phoned me immediately upon returning to campus to see if I had seen the race. I had. Seeing the joy and happiness on his face was one of the most endearing things I've ever seen! His life was changing rapidly. Car, shoe endorsement, etc. Through this transition, he remained as humble as ever! That speaks volumes to the character of this man. Blessed! Shortly thereafter, my Caribbean king came along, Spirit told me he's my future and my excursion on the wild side of life ended. We disengaged as amicably as we engaged. But, I must confess that I was not unhappy to later learn that he never married his betrothed. I wanted the very best for him. That wasn't me, and I didn't believe it was her either. Brother was kissed by God and deserved to be happy. I sensed that his betrothed's personality was too domineering for his warm, gentle nature. I hope I was in his life if only to help him find a more compatible life mate.

As for my husband, he would love me bald. ☺ But, he loves my natural hair all the same. Ultimately, it's the human spirit that we come to love. The hair is merely an external covering. While we can care for and appreciate it as gifted by the Creator, it is paramount that we do not make it an idol in its own right. When I see the extent to which some sisters are posting selfies to express their newfound self-love, I wonder where healthy love and destructive vanity begin and end. It's a fine line. And we must be as careful in judging our own motivations as we are in judging others'. Ultimately, people like what they like. Amen. Give thanks and do your thang. And when encountering a seeming "fetishizer," be willing to first say yes before no. You may be surprised to discover that a fetish is really appreciation in an intimidated, uncomfortable disguise. Peace and love.

## [Fr. Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation](#): Necessary Falling Apart (Friday, July 8, 2016)

Most religion is highly "legitimizing religion." It is used for social control and public order both by the powers that be and by people who want to be in control. This limited use of religion has allowed much of Christian history to participate in a toxic and unjust environment—just as long as we have "a personal relationship with Jesus." This will not work anymore; in fact, it never did.

The American Bishops, paraphrasing many recent Papal statements, said that "social justice is an integral part of evangelization, a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel, and an essential part of the Church's mission." [1] Social critique is not an add-on, an option, a choice, or a unique vocation for a few. If Jesus is indeed "the Savior of the world" (John 4:42), we must not, we cannot, continue to think of salvation as merely a private matter. We are wasting our time trying to convert individuals without also challenging corporate sin and institutionalized evil. Otherwise, we send momentarily changed people back into the world; now they think they are godly, but they are the opposite of godly, and the disguise is perfect. As Jesus says, "the last state of the house is worse than the first" (Matthew 12:45).

It has taken Christians a long time to be able to see the Gospel in a fully historic, social, and political context; although this is clearly God's concern, starting with the Book of Exodus. Truly transformed people change the world; while fundamentally unchanged people soon conform to the world (see Romans 12:2). Culture will win out every time, if it is not also critiqued. Politicians normally prefer an unaware and superficial populace.

Dorothy Day put it even more strongly: "Our problems stem from our acceptance of this filthy, rotten system." [2] As long as we unquestioningly buy into the egoic system, where the roots of our narcissism often lie hidden, we're going to have problems. If we think we can say our private prayers and still genuflect before the self-perpetuating, unjust systems of this world, our conversion will not go very deep or last very long. There is no one more radical than a real person of prayer because they are not beholden to any ideology or economic system; their identity and motivation is found only in God, not in the pay-offs of "mammon." Both church and state are threatened by true mystics. Such enlightened people can't be bought off or manipulated, because their rewards are always elsewhere.

Most of us need to have the status quo shaken now and then, leaving us off balance and askew, feeling alienated for a while from our usual unquestioned loyalties. In this uncomfortable space, we can finally recognize the much larger kingdom of God. Many churches don't seem to understand this, even flying the national flag in the sanctuary. After authentic conversion, our old "country" no longer holds any ultimate position. We can't worship it as we were once trained to do.

This pattern of temporary falling apart precedes every transition to a new level of faith, hope, and love. If one is not prepared to live in temporary chaos and to hold the necessary anxiety that chaos entails, one never moves into a Bigger World. Notice that almost every theophany (revelation of God) begins with the same warning: "Do not be afraid." Fear is an entirely predictable response to any God encounter, because any authentic experience of the Absolute relativizes everything else. God is actually quite wild and dangerous, but we domesticated divine experience so much that a vast majority of people have left the search entirely, finding most religious people to be fearful conformists instead of adventurous seekers of Love and Mystery. [Personal Note: I LOVE THIS MAN!! Schatzi]

### References:

[1] U.S. bishops, *Communities of Salt and Light*, as quoted <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/new-evangelization-social-justice.cfm>.

[2] Dorothy Day, as quoted by Michael O. Garvey in the Foreword, *On Pilgrimage* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: 1999), xi.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (The Crossroad Publishing Company: 1999), 157-158, 160-161.

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*On institutional reform in America:  
The journey of a thousand miles begins  
with the first step. Lao Tzu*

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