

hello eric!

i wanted to ask you this question when you were in oregon in may, but i was too shy, so seeing that you were accepting questions for this column gladdened me. essentially, i've fallen in love with a political prisoner. it is that future-altering, liberating love. but i'm out here, and they're in there. i resonate a lot with your & rochelle's story, so i'm curious—what advice would you give someone like me, someone like yourself ten or so years ago? if you could tell yourself from then anything, what would it be? what are the biggest lessons you've learned about transformative love that transcends prison bars, and how it's maintained once you're out? thank you in advance for any words, i really appreciate it!!

-m

Hey M,

I think your question is important because it is something that is still a bit taboo. People love to support prisoners and abolition and all that, but many still hold a deep down judgment of love inside. I don't know if that is misogynist or what, but it's fucking annoying.

Rochelle and I have been together for 11 years now. She is still my best friend, my soul mate, my everything. There have been a number of things that have helped with that and still help with it every single day, and I'll break them down.

Radical vulnerability:

A relationship inside (or once they're outside) cannot exist with walls placed up between you. There cannot be things that are held back, there cannot be "I didn't want to bother them with my problems when they have so much going on" bullshit.

Your life is just as important and just as meaningful. Your feelings are just as important. Your day to day is just as important. One of the most beautiful things Rochelle did was include me in HER life. She also offered a safe place to talk about mine (what I could say without getting myself or others in heat with the prison), and because I had that it gave me hope for life outside. Now I was apart of the world, now I was seen as a human. Not a tokenized prisoner, not an Inmate number, but a human who is loved. When I got out there were a lot of things I had never spoken about, and she gave me the space and trust to have those discussions as well.

Radical Trust:

I am not talking about 'She better not cheat!' trust. I am talking about; I trust you when you tell me things. I trust you when you talk about the future. I trust that you are putting me first no matter how hard things get. I trust that you will tell me if I hurt you. I trust that you will not hold back. I trust that if you hang out with some dude and I got jealous, that I can have that conversation and we can work on the 'why' of it all. Also though, I trust you to call me out. I trust that if I am acting crazy or wild, out of character, putting OUR future on the line, that you will be honest with me. So many supporters will ignore it and say things like "I don't understand their life, we just HAVE TO SUPPORT their choices". No you don't. If this is a relationship, then our decisions both matter. If things are happening that can prevent us being together or talking, then a call out and honest discussion is desperately needed no matter how hard it is. I trust you to trust me. I trust you to love me enough to hold me accountable. We went through this a lot. I went way too hard for way too long, and it hurt her deeply, and I owed it to my future and my love to tighten the fuck up. Fight to Win, and the victory is the relationship you have.

Grow Together:

Rochelle and I are not the same people from when we first met. She has been through life and hurt and joy and wins and losses that have affected and changed her. I have been through my own brutality and suffered my own deep trauma that has changed me. We are not our younger selves. The love is though. The love has grown and adapted to who we are NOW, not who we were. I do not expect her to be 30 year old Rochelle, and she doesn't with me. We work on our trauma together, we work on our hurtful behavior together, we celebrate so much together. We have grown and I love her more now than ever, because we have developed together. The lack of growth is death, and if your relationship isn't moving forward, then it is stagnating and you do not want that.

These are the things that worked for us. I cannot promise they will work for you or anyone else. I put in A LOT of work because Rochelle deserved it. I read books on trauma and jealousy. I did a lot of internal work to see how I can be a better partner for the person I love. Your partner needs to do the same. No matter how good things are, the work cannot stop. You deserve that. He deserves that. But never put yourself on the back burner, never forget your worth and value.

I wish you all the love and all the success. I wish you both happiness and victories and growth and joy. The world sucks, but we can always find love and once you have it, be willing to fight for it. Love is a revolutionary act.

Please write prisoners, it can change their life and it can change yours.

Towards Liberation

EK