

## A Love Story Beyond Borders and Social Rules

Lisa Arnone (January 29, 2019)



"Asking Mario to marry me was the boldest and bravest thing I had ever done, second only my coming out as queer. It felt to me like it was meant to be, just as New York City seemed to be the place that Mario was clearly meant to be." Lisa and Mario met in Italy in 1981. Their love crossed borders of gender and acceptance showing that deep feelings can go beyond conformism. Their story, although personal, tells us a lot about Italy and the US from the 80s to nowadays.

I met Mario in 1981. I was living in [Urbino](#) [2] and he was the first Italian gay person that I met. He was 23 years old and I was 21. He had fallen for an adorable boy that came over with the second group of students for that school year. Mario was the coolest. He always looked good and he was open, curious, and accepting. Even more endearing was that he was a boy in love.



My experience in Urbino before meeting Mario had been one in which I felt that any deviation from the norms of dress or behavior resulted in suspiciousness. Italy was in the middle of a heroin epidemic, so much so that holes were drilled into all of the spoons at our local cafe. Any counterculture look could easily get you labeled as a drug user / troublemaker.

Mario instead joined our group of misfits without hesitation. He didn't judge. Mario was more interested in pushing limits than in maintaining them. He opened up another entirely new, Italian world for me, one that was welcoming to me not as an outsider, but as a kindred spirit. Where you were from didn't matter to Mario, only who you were mattered.

I had my first experience of the ecstasy of eating a fresh tomato with him as he instructed me how to prepare it - on a piece of bread with a little salt and olive oil. Mario was a born instructor which sometimes meant bossy and sometimes meant he was about to explode your world open.

I was with him the day his American boyfriend left Urbino; he was limp with grief. I picked him up from the airport the first time he came to NYC. We danced and laughed and had delicious, joyful celebrations. During that first visit, Mario traveled to visit his boyfriend hoping to reunite with him. He was disappointed to find no reunion waiting and returned to the city sad and a little lost.

We spent the following month together at my father's house. I was depressed because my sister was dying and he was depressed because of his lost love. We were broken-hearted together - sleeping close until noon then rousing ourselves to head out into the promise of a day in the city. When Mario returned to Italy, he went with an idea about his future which included a life here, in our new world.

Somewhere over the next year and after another visit, as Mario and I grew to feel that continuing our long distance relationship was too painful, I suggested that we get married. Asking Mario to marry me was the boldest and bravest thing I had ever done, second only my coming out as queer. It felt to me like it was meant to be, just as New York City seemed to be the place that Mario was clearly meant to be.

I was just a slightly irregular girl who grew up in the Bronx. I had existed in a very small world a few blocks wide until I headed off to upstate NY for college, but asking Mario to marry me felt like the right thing to do; he made the extraordinary seem doable.

I flew from my sister's sickbed, with her hearty approval, to marry Mario in Cambridge City Hall. We prepared ourselves with great care. I was adorned and primed for the ceremony which was beautifully written and then articulated eloquently by the two of us in the presence of our officiator. It was a beautiful ceremony. We actually brought the justice of the peace to tears. It was one of the most fun days of my life - idyllic, joyful, and life altering, a day that influenced the trajectory of my life. After the ceremony, I remember being surprised by how meaningful it had felt. For all my cynicism about the institution of marriage (at age 22), I was struck by a sense that a bond had been created between us that was profound and durable.

Mario and I did many life changing things together from the moment I met him and over all the years of our relationship. We spent stretches of time together which would always result in, and sometimes catapult us into, some new turn forward in our paths. Last summer we planned our retirement together. Sharing his house in Italy, making it work for both of us. We would hold each other up and keep each other going. A shared vision of the future. Everyone was welcome to join.

My last week with Mario was a gift that I will always treasure. When he was lucid, we would discuss our plans for the house and our being together there. We prayed he would have more time so that we could live it. He asked me to remarry him and gave me a ring from his finger. We were married



again.

Mario did not want to die, but he accepted it. In the end, he welcomed it as the only relief from his pain. He was beautiful to the end. Each day, I find it impossible anew to imagine a world without him in it.

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[2] <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/828>