

“How we became a couple: our story”

by Giovanna Celia and Mauro Cozzolino

Mauro and I attended the same University in Rome during the same years. We took the same exams the same days, without ever meeting each other. Interestingly, as we have accurately reconstructed that period in our lives, we have found out that we had chosen to sign up for the same college courses and, that in many occasions, we were there in the same classroom, side by side, close to each other, without ever “seeing” one another. I used to live in Rome but I came from the town of Salerno while Mauro lived in Naples, about 35 miles north of Salerno. After our graduation we both followed different paths. Even so, we became involved as researchers at the University of Salerno, at the same time, even though neither of us had initially considered the idea of working with scientific research as a professional choice.

By chance, at one of the first days into our separate projects, we came across each other in the library: we immediately recognized one another in a meaningful, heartfelt way. Sadly, however, we were already in a relationship with other people. Nevertheless, the *feeling was like* we had been looking for each other forever... then, finding each other, at last, even if by chance! We were very young then. We both were undergoing our training as psychotherapists – Giovanna was undergoing training in strategic psychotherapy, and Mauro specializing in systemic relational therapy. That day at the library we talked for a long time about our work and studies with great passion and involvement. Unexpectedly, from the following day on everything changed radically, assuming a negative meaning. Somehow we became bitter enemies and for the following three years we worked together but literally “detesting” each other, thinking and saying the worst things about one another. We used to think we were so different, having nothing in common... Then, one day, an unexpected event happened that went beyond our conscious will.

Just as we were near the end of our separate psychotherapy training, we were pressured into holding a joint group session initially planned for two separate groups. Due to quite obscure reasons except for the strong wish to work in collaboration, the two groups refused to work separately, insisting on joining together. Since Mauro and I had an awful relationship and an awful opinion of each other, we did it so unwillingly... as we were compelled to do it as a unit, together, despite all those awful feelings. The surprising result was that even though we had never experienced facilitating group work together, we immediately felt so comfortable with each other, working so well together.... It was so magic and extraordinary for both of us! We intuitively divided the tasks between us; Giovanna assumed responsibility for the emotional state of the group while Mauro dealt with the cognitive aspects. Since then, 17 years have passed. Although it has been so many years since that group experience, the individuals

who took part in it still come to visit us occasionally. They tell us how their life has changed from that moment on. Nobody, included the two of us could imagine how such an extraordinary, profound and above all, *natural chemistry*, could develop from two such different and hostile individuals...

From that moment on, our life has changed dramatically, more than anything else. Since then, we have no longer been apart. Our personal and professional partnership is made of passions in common but also of deep differences. This integration between passions in common and profound differences has always been the right ingredient to enable us to build so many small and great things together, in scientific, clinical and personal terms. The theme of our story seems to be made of the unexpected and surprising events. Independently from our respective certainties, beliefs and objectives, everything has gone to the opposite direction even in the type of bond we have chosen: marriage and parenthood itself. In fact, neither of us initially believed in the bond of marriage, or even considered becoming a parent. Everything has been so unexpected, so strange, so unusual ... but always so natural at the same time. This feeling was as if our love was naturally inclined to take its own shape even though our conscious will tried to stand up against it. That is why we believe our union is truly based on a “naturalistic approach” to life and love, making us an Ericksonian couple at the unconscious level even before those at the scientific, clinical and educational levels.