

Grounded with feelings

By Ruth Ostrow

THE freeway to the airport is full of bulldozers. It's taking much longer than we expected to get to our destination as cars bank up, stop at traffic lights that were never there before and crawl along at 40km/h in zones that were 100km/h last week.

The roadworks have thrown our whole schedule in doubt. My husband, being the practical kind, had calculated to the second when we had to leave, including daylight-savings conversions, because we are driving from northern NSW to Coolangatta airport in Queensland. But we are now crawling along in agonising metres.

Never mind. For me the situation is perfect. Driving to the airport, going away for a few days, husband trapped in the car and unable to move for an hour - what a great chance to discuss The Relationship.

"Darling, how are you feeling about The Relationship?" I ask, trying to open the discussion.

Darling looks immediately like a cat about to be taken off to the vet. The cars in front have put their brakes on, he makes a moaning noise, sweat is forming on his brow. He is contemplating his odds. If he jumps now, would he be squashed by oncoming traffic? Or would it be less painful to discuss The Relationship?

"I think everything is fine," he says, more hopeful than sincere.

"Well, there are a few things I'd like to clear up, since we have some time to have a bit of a heart-to-heart."

His body slumps. The traffic speeds up. He has missed his chance to throw himself kamikaze-style from the car.

"I think we need to discuss feelings more," I say. "I would like you to open up to me more about your feelings."

He stares ahead at the road as I explain my new theory on relationships. It's not the person we're in love with who makes us happy or unhappy, it's how we feel when we are with them, what we become in their presence.

And it is the parts of ourselves we are able to express when we are with that person that we really fall in love with.

Which explains why so many people choose really strange partners. For instance, a guy might be incompetent or a real under-achiever. Others may wonder why that gifted, intelligent woman would stay with him. But his vulnerability may be the very thing that allows his girlfriend to experience her own deeply maternal or nurturing side.

My husband is a high-achiever - very capable and down-to-earth. This has helped me become more savvy, worldly and real. I love this part of myself and I love him for bringing it out in me.

But I'm thinking aloud that it would be nice to experiment with a bit more mushy, touchy-feely stuff.

"Darling, don't you sometimes wish you were more v.u.l.n.e.r.a.b.l.e.?"

"Mmmmmm," he says.

"I'd like to express that loving part of my own heart more with your loving open heart."

"Mmmmmm," he says, staring straight ahead.

"So now tell me how are you really feeeeeeling?"

The cars have stopped again. He turns and looks at me. "Ummmmm, what do you want me to say?"

"Tell me how you are really feeeeeeling."

"I am angry."

"At me?"

"No, because the road is so busy."

Well, at least it's a start. "Do you feel you express your vulnerability enough?" I ask. "Mmmmmm," he continues as the car finally careers along the freeway.

"Because that would help me be more nurturing," I say as we pull into the airport.

He tries to jump out of the car. "But we haven't finished expressing ourselves," I say, grabbing his arm. "But we're late," he says, looking panicked. I look at the clock and know we have arrived an hour before the flight leaves and have plenty of time.

"You can stop being so practical. I need to express my feelings about The Relationship," I say, continuing to talk as he wriggles about. "We really have to go," he says finally.

"But I want to hear from you. Look at the clock. We have one more hour ..."

"No we don't. I adjusted it to Queensland time before we left. So it really is 2.15pm - not 2.15pm NSW time, which you think is still only 1.15pm in Queensland," says my pragmatic husband.

"But my flight is at 2.20pm!"

"You said 2.40pm," he protests.

"No I didn't," I say, scrambling for the itinerary and pulling things out of bags. "Help me, help me find the details."

My handbag is a chaotic mess. As papers go flying, there is a loud roar. My flight takes off overhead. We stare up in shock as the plane - the only one I could get on for two months - dips down as if to say goodbye.

I turn slowly and look at my husband's intelligent, practical face, the one that doesn't like discussing The Relationship but has gotten me on planes, on time, for 10 years. He is frowning angrily. And I know that he has some feeeeeelings he is about to share with me.

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