



Chapter Sixteen: Going forward

Most polyamorous people who have created successful and healthy relationships will humbly acknowledge that they have had a few disastrous and painful break-ups along the way. Luckily, they have learned from their mistakes and have eventually developed a skill set that has helped them select appropriate partners and be good partners themselves. This steep learning curve has helped them figure out what model of open relationships they want, improved their communication with partners, and given them enough practice to develop the strong interpersonal skills required for sustaining poly relationships.

This is especially true for older people who pioneered open relationships during an era when few resources existed. Buddy says, "My wife Estelle and I were stumbling in the dark trying to have what we called an open marriage in the 1980's and 90's, before the Internet existed and there were literally no books about it and the word polyamory had not been invented yet. Even though we lived in New York City, we could not find any therapist who knew anything, and in fact they were all very hostile to anything outside of traditional monogamy, and said we must be sex addicts or mentally ill to even be trying this." Estelle adds, "I have a lot of regrets because I fell in love with a married man and his wife eventually divorced him because she decided she wanted monogamy. I have apologized to her for the pain this caused her, and tried to make amends, but the reality is that we had no idea what we were doing, and no one to give us any guidance. My lover is still with me and he is living with us now" Estelle adds, "Everyone in our large poly community here in New York seems to see us as role models. We remind them that we inadvertently hurt some people along the way because of our lack of skills and knowledge about ourselves and polyamory. We really encourage people to take the poly workshops and classes, read the books, get therapy; utilize all the poly resources out there, so you WON'T hurt other people by being incompetent like we were."

Lise says, "It's hard to admit that you've made a mess of your relationships, but how could any of us possibly know how to 'do' successful poly relationships? Open relationships are very complex, and it takes years to build a poly skill set. Unfortunately we had to do it through trial and error." She expresses regrets about "dragging Carinne through years of confusion and aggravation; I would try so hard to be monogamous because I thought that was the only option. Then of course I would meet another irresistible woman and I would cheat, and feel guilty, and promise never to do it again." Carinne says, "I wish someone had sat Lise down and just told her, hey, it's fine to want more than one partner, just figure out how to do it in a mature, responsible way, without driving everyone bonkers. She gradually learned how to be in a relationship with me, living with me and keeping her commitments to me, and also manage her time and energy well enough to have another girlfriend and keep her happy, too." Lise adds, "If we decide to have kids, we will definitely explain to them that being monogamous or being poly are equally valid lifestyles.. That kind of support could save the next generation of poly people a lot of angst."