

People Are Like Waves
By, Lauren Stockmon Brown

“I love you,” I reassured him.

“I care for you deeply,” Boubacar explained.

“I want you to be the best version of yourself and if your higher power is calling you to make this decision then I will choose for us.”

“Please, just let me wait until after Ramadan... I’m going to decide after Ramadan.”

“No. The universe that I believe in told me to never pressure adult-people to do the things they don’t want to do... If someone would like to share energy with me or you, then the most meaningful energy will be felt when both parties *actually* want to be there.”

I smiled at my dear friend.

I remembered our ice cream trips, adventures to the movies in Senegal, and his unwavering belief in my inner power to become everything I’ve always wanted to be. I simultaneously felt a gash of his absence and a calming sensation that came in waves.

People are like waves, I thought to myself.

People are like waves, I reminded myself.

People are like waves.... I comforted the part of myself that aches when the people I love leave, move on, break up, divorce, re-marry, die, or for whatever reason, just choose to walk away.

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4 WEEKS EARLIER....

“I don’t understand.... How could you not believe in the essence that made the sunset and rise, brought life to grass and provided our world with energy and light?”

I laughed at Boubacar’s comments.

I loved the way we could laugh and jump into an esoteric conversation about his version of God in His purest form. I loved the way we ate ice cream and found hope in each other’s view of existence. I genuinely liked how different he was than me. Even when it was difficult to understand. I loved that difficulty. I thrived in the complexities of his thought and found “life” when he disagreed with me. He would look at me strangely as if I were a risk to his belief in faith. And, in its essence, I am, and I was.

I identify as nonbinary, and I like women, men, and everything in between. I treat my femininity like drag, and I have a well-groomed habit of oversharing. I talk about the women I adore like a hopeless romantic caught in the rain. I tend to push buttons (if I feel safe). I find awkwardness in confinement, so I do whatever is necessary to make myself and others feel unique.

I think that Boubacar truly enjoyed this side of me. I think Boubacar knew how to live in this version of life with me, this duplicity of thought and multiplicity of feeling. I think we helped each other feel more alive and simultaneously confused one another with our systems of living.

“Just because God made the sun, doesn’t mean I’m going to suck his d*** for it...”

I laughed and looked at my friend in the driver’s seat, waiting for him to laugh along with me...

To no one’s surprise, he did not find that comment funny. He seemed to be acting a bit guilty.

I think this is the moment when everything changed for us.

I think he began to look at me differently. Not the typical look of strangeness he used to give me that I’ve also grown to adore, it was more so— disappointment... Guilt by association, per say. And I think I only now understand how deeply that comment might’ve touched whatever is inside of his soul that brings him life.

“I don’t even know how to process that comment. Like, my brain doesn’t even know how to compute those words...” Boubacar stammered.

“Oh shit, I’m so sorry— I really didn’t mean to... I was just kidding, and I think I just forgot where I am (*Dakar, Senegal*), and I just got caught up cause’ we were making jokes and laughing together... and you kept pressuring me about religion and God and... and... I’m sorry if I made that weird.”

“No, no, it’s okay. I was just really caught off guard. I think. I’ve just never heard anyone say that before.”

I continued to smell the skin of my clementine, hoping it would ground me back into a situation that felt more familiar. I love the clementines in Senegal; they’re perfectly round, juicy, seedless and they smell *so* alluring. Ah! The perfect distraction I thought....

And, to no avail, as the energy in our space was tainted. Tainted by my carelessness in wording. Littered by my deep-seeded connection to not liking when people tell me what to do. Exposed by the reality of my sexuality in most religions being considered a sin.

And, if I were in that situation again, I wouldn’t say what I said exactly how I said it. But my belief and thoughts would remain the same because the universe that I believe in is not one I will likely ever choose to worship. Unfortunately, I think my genuine candidness truly hurt my friend’s feelings.

8 WEEKS EARLIER....

“Yeah, so I’m going to the movies tonight,” Boubacar said as he slowly looked up from his computer screen.

“The movies!! I love the movies. And I *miss* popcorn very much so... Mm, sounds amazing...”

“Oh, well do you want to come with me? I mean, we can invite your other friends too, if you’d like to.... And I’m like pretty sure tonight’s movie is in English... So?”

“I mean, I was going to do some research today, but okay, okay yes... I would love to. This is going to be fun.”

“Alright, amazing. And, we can get ice cream before too, I know a spot.”

“Sounds perfect.”

“Cool. So, just come to my office around ~5PM and then we’ll head out together.”

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I don’t even like sweets— I usually skip desert. And I choose to force feed myself cake on my birthday. I like that it makes my friends happy. I like that they like cake. So, I decidedly convinced myself that I would try Boubacar’s “ice cream spot,” even if we were going to eat desert before dinner (*eye roll*). I could step out of my detailed routine and anxiety-inducing regimen today, just for today, I thought.

Plus, I love making new friends.

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So, I went to get ice cream at least once or twice a week for the next two months....

For the company, I would say ☺.

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Fortunately, that day, and many days after that one, I decided to ditch the library at the research center as I slinked away for some ice cream. I hopped in Boubacar’s car, and it immediately felt like I was in high school all over again. I was pulling out of the “Senior Lot” and getting caught up in the moment with this stranger sitting next to me. I was lost in the feeling of discovery and slow drives as we were in search of how to spend the rest of our day. Time.

In that moment, I fully loved the concept of time, how fulfilling it made me feel in the most unexpected ways.

Boubacar pulled into this empty parking lot and pointed to a dingy-looking shack that housed our ice cream. I decided to keep it safe and went for the Senegalese equivalent of cookies and cream in a “rolled ice cream” shape. He went for the flavors that reminded him of *home* as he explained how he would come to this exact ice cream sport throughout his childhood. Boubacar reached out and gave me some fruit to try— hilariously— he forgot to mention that there’s a seed in this fruit so you can’t actually eat it and or swallow it. Apparently, you’re only supposed to suck on it slowly and then spit it out quickly.

But alas, I did not know this... So, I started to bite the seed and felt its wet skin rub against my tongue. I looked at Boubacar strangely and said,

“Oh, it’s really good, but it’s a bit tough to chew, um...”

Immediately, he stopped speaking Wolof to our ice cream guy, laughed, and then pointed at me. He shouted behind his laughter, “Nooo, you’re not supposed to eat it, you just try it and then spit it out!”

Absolutely embarrassing.... I spit the fruit out and thought to myself, *damn (lmao) I was genuinely eager to impress my hopeful friend, and I couldn’t even eat fruit right.*

I decidedly glared at Boubacar and then gradually joined him in this moment of joy.

As our ice cream was being prepared, Boubacar asked me,

“Have you ever had coconut water before?”

“No, well I mean, only in the states out of a carton....”

Playfully, he shook his head in disgust. *Classic American*, I knew he was thinking.

He pulled me over to the other side of the parking lot and started speaking to the man selling coconuts in Wolof. I thoroughly enjoyed how Boubacar would treat everyone he spoke to like long-lost friends, family even.

I found it to be endearing and unusual.

After he handed me the coconut, I sipped the water and took a moment to truly take it in— Intriguingly, it tasted thick, yet thin. Sweet and savory. Filling as well as the equivalent of consuming nothing.

We sat on the edge of the cliff and looked out at the beach. I like how you can see an endless pool of blue on the beaches in Dakar. I like that Boubacar wanted to show me his home. I like that Boubacar told me that I could share anything with him. I like that he told me not to have barriers or worry about what I’m about to say next. He assured me that he wasn’t a “sensitive guy” or someone who anxiously thinks about every misplaced phrase or sentence.

I really liked this about him.

3 DAYS LATER.....

In hindsight, I'm realizing how human it is to for our "bandwidths of tolerance" to constantly fluctuate. And this is okay. Uncertainty even in response to certainty is okay. Perhaps the humblest act of being human is to acknowledge the nimbleness of the "absolute."

For instance, even when the girl I adore tells me that she *really* likes me and believes it to be true, these are the exact moments in which I'm most unsure of if she's telling me the "truth."

Sometimes "certainty" causes reasons for alarm. Particularly if you're struggling with any reminiscences of childhood trauma— a bodily reaction may spark "fight or flight," and in response—lead us perhaps towards *something* even more unknown.

But, if "uncertainty" is what scares us then how do we know that we'll be safe when we get to what we are running *towards* and away *from*...? I think I'm beginning to realize how in many instances, uncertainty helps us humans feel seemingly— alive.

Now the question becomes— Is the need to feel "alive," our goal for existing?

MY BRAIN...



Timing in life is everything and nothing.
Funny and sad.

Since living abroad, it's been easy to lose track of time. It can often either feel like time is going too slowly or time is moving too quickly... In many ways, I've had to re-adjust my relationship to "time" as I continue to throw myself into uncomfortable spaces, new relationships and awkward moments sprinkled in with culture shock, language barriers and every-day decisions (lmao).

The week before Boubacar told me that he couldn't be my friend, I had a childhood friend, Rebecca Ozer (Nickname: Bdozer) visiting. Particularly throughout these last few weeks, it was truly grounding to look over and smile at my friend who has known many different sides of who I am and who I would like to become. I will forever remember laughing together at how simultaneously unsettling and comforting it can feel to watch each other change and grow.

Our moments together reminded me of a version of myself, that felt "confused" about various aspects of themselves. I think that version of myself would be proud of our ability to accept Boubacar's hesitation to be our friend.

However, I also know that part of myself can be triggered into old thought-patterns and can easily fall into traps of loneliness rather quickly.

BUT, back to my original question about "living—"Is the need to feel "alive," our goal for existing?

My answer: I'm not sure, but I like how Boubacar always called himself a "voyageur" in this life.

voyager. plural. voyagers. DEFINITIONS1. **someone who travels on a long journey, especially by boat.**

Seemingly, whenever our conversations became *too* esoteric or *too* rooted in "personal desires" and "worldly possessions," he explained how his time on this earth is truly limited.

To Boubacar, as humans, we are currently only experiencing the trailer, patiently waiting for the real movie to begin. However, not only is my friend on a quest, he's in the middle of a test that he has an unwavering belief can and will determine his fate.

I think this is my favorite quality about Boubacar, his unwavering belief in *something*.

I've always found that quite difficult—faith.... Faith in a religious sense and just having "faith" on a day-to-day basis.

(In case you couldn't tell based on the last sentence above 😊...) Currently, I'm diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and I've been taking these beautiful blue and orange pills every morning since the Spring of 2021.

Faith. *What a wild concept.*

I love its ability to nurse "complexity" back to a space of acceptance.

I love how my relationship to faith has grown incessantly since bringing the chemicals in my brain to a manageable balance.

Intriguingly, I've found that it's somehow easier to *believe* in "faith" when you actually want to be *here*. Constantly, I'm in awe of how much Boubacar wants to be *here* and even *there*. "There" being the afterlife and "here" being the trailer before the movie.

I will never take this for granted— How there was a point during his quest, when he wanted to be *here* eating ice cream with me.

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Timing in life is everything and nothing.
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CURRENT DAY

Two days before Ramadan ended and about 9 days after starting to write this text, Boubacar called me. Hesitantly, I returned his call and waited for the voice on the other end of the phone to speak...

"Yo, L, I'm getting a haircut, whatchu doing?"

"What do you want?" I rolled my eyes and knew he could hear me smiling through the phone."

"Yoooo, don't be like that.... Don't... Don't treat me like I'm an ass hole...."

"You said you didn't want to be my friend anymore you are an...."

"No! You pushed me, I said that I needed more time to think, I wanted to decide after Ramadan...."

"I just don't even understand you, so you do want to be my friend again?"

"Hey! It's not that I didn't want to be your friend, I just... Listen, can I pick you up after my haircut and we can go for a little drive. We can talk..."

"You're a fcking psycho, you know that right?"

"What!! Okay fine, I'll pick you up in ~20...."

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I will never truly understand Boubacar's system of living, and he will never truly accept mine....
But I do know one thing for certain, my friendship with Boubacar gives me faith.