

I had the opportunity to spend time

with Thomas Savino, Prospanica CEO, and Bill Schwartz, a member of the Prospanica National Board. We met at a favorite spot of Bill's, and during this holiday season, NYC felt alive and festive, a sharp change from last year's intense quarantine and subsequent isolation.

For me, coming outside to socialize and build has become more intentional. I often say, as a social worker and educator, I am in the business of relationships. Relationship-building requires me to use myself and my experiences to open up spaces for people to tell their stories and then, ideally, do the same for others. Yet I have observed through my teaching and consulting that "we" as a society tend to be more comfortable making assumptions rather than asking questions. We lean into—and we own—our individual schemas, oftentimes without much interrogation at all. As a result, we operate from a place of knowing that is very small and limited but also, perhaps, very comfortable. We have images and behaviors in our minds of what it means to be Latina/o/x, and sometimes they arrive with religious, class, and racial affiliations.

This particular gathering was an intentional and successful effort to push back against that stereotyping and identity conflation. We broke bread, sat in a brave space of dialogue, and moved from our boxes of conflated identities—many of which were trauma-filled—to an open field of possibility, promise, and the freedom to live lovingly in our complexities.

In terms of my cultural and religious identity, I am Latina and Jewish. I grew up in a home surrounded by racism and anti-Semitism, and my life's work has been to create spaces of solidarity and to identify my markers of identity: what it means to be Latina, what it means to be Jewish, and how to embrace and live wholeheartedly within that complexity. Both of these identities contain histories of the intergenerational trauma that lived in in my home. My parents did not marry within their race, religion, or culture. Although this has not been explicitly named, as a social worker and clinician who has studied trauma, I might hypothesize that the impact of my parents' own intergenerational traumas led them to search for something very different than their own.

I think this question of **what does it mean to be...***fill in the blank* is a personal question that requires a journey for each of us. Yet somehow society and, sometimes, even our own families and communities have played the role of defining what that is for us instead of allowing us the psychological freedom to decide for ourselves. These sociological constraints bring with them hosts of trauma. Telling someone that I am Latina and also Jewish and having them respond with "No you aren't," or "Are you sure?", coupled with the assumption of what being Jewish or Latina means and looks like, is trauma.

How do we get into the practice of conscious curiosity? I think it's even more difficult after an intense 19 months of isolation. How do we **actively** seek out moments of relationship-building to **actively** listen to one another? How do we, as a Prospanica community, heal and help others heal from intergenerational trauma?

Justice work, in and of itself, is healing. Now, during this holiday time especially, we encourage you to gather, break bread, dialogue, actively listen and create those spaces of solidarity.

