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Unlikely Friends: Keagan and Trevor

“We’ve created a judgment-free (or ‘lighthearted judgment only’) environment in our friendship.” In this series of interviews, pairs of friends from different parts of the world talk about how they met, what they value about each other, and how they navigate their differences.

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*Keagan Chad and Trevor Mofokeng
are science students at Nelson*

Mandela University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

How did the two of you meet?

Trevor: I met Keagan on campus through a mutual friend after a class that we had together.

Keagan: That's right. After a lecture, I met up with the only person from university I knew at the time, and she was standing next to Trevor and some other people I now call friends. We all met up outside the building and we spoke for a couple minutes and that's when I first started speaking to Trevor.

Trevor: It was a small group of about five people. We had a light conversation ranging between several topics and at one point, I remember all of us shaking hands and announcing ourselves to be friends, a random promise that we have all kept to this day.

What makes you unlikely friends?

Keagan: Our races definitely make us unusual friends.

Trevor: Keagan is white, and I am black. Port Elizabeth is one part of South Africa where race isn't a huge factor of life, but it remains a lingering background factor in a university environment, students tend to group themselves according to their own race for their own preferred reasons and Keagan and I just happened to defy that factor.

Keagan: I consider myself an atheist, while Trevor is Christian. I've personally learned a lot about religion from him, and he has introduced me to some religious acts, like fasting.

Do you often talk about your differences?

Trevor: We talk about everything. Discussions of our differences don't have a starting point: they slide themselves into other conversations. We don't set out to talk about our differences, and when those conversations happen, they tend to go on for a while and die out by lack of contribution or the start of another conversation.

Keegan: It's easy to talk about sensitive topics with Trevor because he doesn't get offended easily. Some people would see the questions I ask him about religion as an attack against their faith, but he attempts to answer them logically.

Can you tell us about a time you shared your convictions with Trevor?

Keegan: I remember an interesting conversation about self-defense, sin, and revenge. We were having lunch with a couple of other friends. We

agreed that self-defense would be acceptable in the case of an attack, to protect a loved one, but Trevor said that it would be wrong to seek revenge another day because that sort of revenge is sinful. My response was that my main motive would be to avenge my loved one's life, because I do not owe anything to a higher power. Trevor explained the consequences of my actions in light of that sort of situation referring to sin, after life and the science behind it. We never resolved that difference because the conversation was interrupted.

Do you think your friendship has made you better people?

Keegan: Definitely. I've learned how to interact with new people which I used to struggle with a lot more.

Trevor: And Keegan has taught me some useful social skills and has broadened my knowledge on how to

approach certain topics, and how to give advice about intimate things. I believe that this has made me a much better friend.

Interesting. Can you give an example of a skill you've learned from Keagan?

Trevor: As a scientist, I have a lot of atheist friends, including Keagan. One conversation with him has sort of become my point of reference for other conversations with atheist friends or people of other beliefs. We were chatting over a Discord call and he mentioned that some scientists or atheists have difficulty believing in a higher power because they fear a being superior to humans. They want to feel in control. That insight helped me to have productive conversations with others and to choose my words carefully to avoid offending others.

You clearly respect one another's viewpoints.

Keegan: Yes, we do. When we have conversations about religion, I tell my views and beliefs to which he responds with his own or acknowledges. While I have learned a lot about religion from him, I still hold true to my beliefs as an atheist.

Trevor: We get a lot of judgment from other people, so we've sort of created a judgment-free (or "lighthearted judgment only") environment in our friendship, which allows me to be completely at ease with him.

How?

Trevor: Keagan is a good listener and quite an easy person to open up to. He's a very open-minded and lighthearted guy, so conversations between us never sound too heavy. We also open up to each other about intimate or personal things, something a lot of young men do not do.

What advice would you give other young men who want to form deep friendships the way you two have?

Keagan: I would say that it's always easier to tell someone about what's making you anxious than continue to carry the weight on your shoulders alone. We often talk about what stresses we face in our lives, such as university work and we're quite open about personal experiences that would normally be difficult to talk about. A lot of the conversations offer a lot of relief.