

Unlikely Friends: Andrew and Tony

“I’ve rarely been prouder of anyone.” 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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Andrew Tucker works for the civil service and is a leadership coach and girls football coach in Salisbury, England. He is married with 2

daughters and became Catholic in 2006. Tony Mullins is currently studying for a Masters in History in Gillingham, England. He lives with various animals including Kail, an American Staffordshire, and Karcocha, a Bull Snake, and chose to become Sikh in 2015.

How did the two of you meet?

Andrew: We met in the mid 90s, we'd both have been about 15 or so.

Tony: Andrew and I met at the football we support, Dulwich Hamlet. Yes, around the mid 90s, a scarily long time ago now.

What makes you unlikely friends?

Tony: This is an interesting question. I grew up in a very diverse area of London, at least in terms of race and religion and had many friends from many different backgrounds. I don't think there is such a thing as unlikely

friends, I firmly believe that goodness seeks out goodness, so I'm not surprised Andrew and I became friends.

Andrew: We have very different social backgrounds and experiences and live (at least in external appearances) very different lives. Our politics at various intervals have been closer or further apart, and our religious beliefs (if not the actions they indicate) are very different. We do share a very childish sense of humor! I think the most unlikely aspect is that without Dulwich it's incredibly unlikely we would have met - our social circles were very different.

Tony: If you had to push for an answer, I would perhaps answer that we come from different social backgrounds, but even that is minor. Quite obviously, we have very different faiths with him being a

Catholic and me being a Sikh, though I was not born into the faith.

Are you comfortable disagreeing with each other?

Tony: Our disagreements are almost always on matters of faith though there is much more that unites us. Though disagreements regarding faith are perfectly natural when two differing paths are taken. When we do disagree, we discuss each other's views respectfully, which I greatly enjoy, and then we agree to disagree. Sikhs are advised via scripture that there is much to be learned and great value to be taken from every faith so I value learning aspects of Catholicism from these disagreements.

Andrew: Our disagreements tend to begin quite naturally - whenever we talk, the conversation tends to meander all over the place and often get quite personal. Ultimately, I think

we both recognise our friendship has very little to do with a need to agree and is more based on a genuine love and affection for the other person.

Where does that genuine love and affection come from? How do you express it?

Andrew: I have numerous examples, not least spending the day together before and after a common (and very close) friend's funeral. But I was delighted to be able to attend Tony's degree graduation in the summer having completed his studies with the Open University in German and History. I've rarely been prouder of anyone and was really touched he asked me to be there.

Tony: Oh there are so many memories I cannot share for fear of embarrassing him! Once we were heading somewhere in the car and Andrew asked if it was alright if we stopped at a church so he could pray.

Naturally this was fine and I accompanied him inside.

What did you think of that?

Tony: I was struck by the devotion and joy this act brought him as well as the other worshippers present. The similarities in this manner are remarkable to those experienced by myself and others at the gurdwara.

What else have you learned through your friendship?

Andrew: One of the best things about our friendship is that neither of us is ever offended by each other's views, no matter how opposed we might be, which makes it a lot easier to have sensible, robust and interesting discussions. Aristotle wrote about the best form of friendship being based not on common interests or need, but about a love of the other person for their own sake simply because of

who they are - this is very much the type of friendship we have.

Tony: I've learnt never to be late to a burger bar after football! On a serious note, I've learnt that love and worship of God, however that is perceived and practiced is of far more importance than others opinions. I've also learnt that it is not enough to say you are something, you actually have to put that into practice.

Does that go both ways?

Andrew: Yes, Tony is the living epitome of the value of persistence and determination, no matter what. I often find myself inspired by him to do more and do better with the various gifts I've been given and he has taught me the value of going out of my way to help people. He's provided lessons in the value of patience, although I suspect I may have at various intervals provided

the same role for him! My life is much better for having him in it.

Read the previous article in this series, from a pair of friends in Canada: Unlikely Friends: Monique and Marie-Maude

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