

Introduction

Hate. We all do it, often without realising. Black against white, Muslim against Christian, Mod against Rocker, Sikh against Hindu, Israeli against Palestinian. Hate. It gets you nowhere and screws you up. So why bother?

Time for a new approach.

This is our true story, a tale of two people who just happened to fall in love. There is no logic to our union for one is black, Christian and Nigerian. The other is white, a punk rocker and English. We can't stand each other's music, clothes, food and humour yet we have been happily married for ten years. How we have managed to achieve this is the basis of the book.

Our book is about discovery, conflict and human nature. It is a tale with no absolute ending but a story that takes the reader through the entire gamut of emotions hidden within any relationship. Via our experiences the book delves into the areas where both tortured pain and delicious pleasure are to be found, as it addresses head on the pitfalls that need to be negated for mixed, or indeed any, marriages to work.

On paper a successful marriage (for us) should be harder than most – given our cultural differences, yet for some strange reason our marriage has been a success. It is a mystery to others how we make it work.

Over the years so many people have told us they cannot fathom how we are together. Surely, I am normally informed, my wife should be adorned with tattoos and body piercings topped off with a mane of pink hair – all on account of my being a punk? She, in turn, is expected to be married to someone who shares her religious conviction and love of Nigerian food. People are therefore surprised when confronted with the reality of my bondage pants or Margaret's African attire. For both of us this is no big deal and our mutual love proves that cultural appearance is much overplayed where finding a life partner is concerned.

So why have we decided to write about our experiences on the rocky road to marital happiness? Well, our inspiration stems from the fact that mixed marriages are so often cast in a negative light, by talk shows, magazine articles etc. Truly, I have lost count of how many times you can pick up a tabloid newspaper and read a story about some middle-aged white woman, who

gives up her cushy English life to go and live in the bush with a Masai warrior. Inevitably these stories go on to question the woman's sanity; how could she fit in culturally with an African man? She must be mad. But supposing the woman is genuinely happy with her lifestyle choice? Who are we to suggest otherwise?

And this is the crux of the matter with mixed marriages – it is a choice that only the two people involved can make. Following on from that it should be stressed that what works for us may not work for everyone, we have just written about our marriage to show that racial segregation is an unnecessary evil. Within these pages we will try to show the benefits of mixed marriages, and demonstrate that those who do take the plunge into more 'exotic' fields, do so for reasons no different to any other.

So how 'exotic' am I?

Well, I'm a thirty-nine-year-old punk rocker with a sad but true cider belly. My hair is greying and the first beachhead has been established at the top of my head by the receding hair army. Exotic? I don't think so.

My wife, on the other hand, could certainly be described as 'exotic'. Not for her colour but because she comes from regal stock. She is forty, comes from the Oshindele family and has a Chief for a Dad.

My father, as a contrast, was a Postman.

Somewhat strangely we have found that our two lives have followed much the same pattern – even from our childhood. Despite our superficially different backgrounds many of our 'cultural' experiences were running parallel to each other. This is certainly one of the points we want to get over in this book; that cultural similarities are often overlooked when society tends to look only at the problems of mixed marriages. It would be foolish to argue that there are no differences in a marriage, with ours being no exception, but generally the shouting fits are outnumbered by the cuddles.

Some readers may find this publication uncomfortable to digest in parts as it is very much a warts and all account of our relationship together. Because of that we were forced to look more closely at certain aspects of our union. As a result we now have a clearer understanding of the underlying tensions within our marriage.

Our experiences also illuminate what is actually happening on our streets under the banner of race and ethnicity, it being a theme that runs concurrent with our story throughout the book. Race comes to prominence every now and again in England – at election times and whenever there is a 'race' riot. It is always there though, bubbling away beneath our feet. How someone's race can influence a couple's relationship is very much a factor in our story.

For many reasons fair-minded white people generally steer clear of talking about race or ethnicity in this country. They recoil in horror at ‘uncomfortable’ words such as race, black or Asian. The reasons for this range from ignorance, prejudice or the fear of being stigmatised as a racist. To both of us this is stupid. Race is a subject like any other.

By heaping mystique and taboo onto race we are just putting it on a higher plain – unable to be debated like other issues. This then leads to myths, stereotypes and ultimately, hatred. This is wrong. If ordinary men and women are not allowed to mention race it becomes the preserve of radical politics. It is time the silent majority had a voice, a voice we have tried to express within the pages of this book.

Throughout *One Love* we highlight all those who espouse racism. It matters not a jot to us if the person giving out the abuse is black or white. As we will show; racism is a bile that affects everyone and is a disease that strikes in many different ways.

But surely we are misguided? Surely England is a nation that ignores race and appreciates ‘diversity’. Yeah right.

Hardly any of its disparate groups mix with one another. All are becoming more insular, as outside factors apply racial straight jackets to those who want to live their lives free from the constraints of race. *One Love* acts as a reflection of our times, being both a personal celebration and damning political critique of multiculturalism. It is the truth behind the propaganda.

The chapters in this book concern subject areas of particular interest and importance to us. Each highlights our views and concludes with a short summary (normally by me – Bobby) outlining how either of us compromised to make it a success.

How a white man can love a black woman and reciprocate her unconditional love is an underlying theme of this book. It is a question we hope the reader remembers throughout. It is a simple question and yet one that puzzles many – given the conversations we have had.

So many books of this nature come from a political viewpoint – seeking to convert the silent or preaching to the converted. This is not one of those. Neither of us belongs to any political party and we are not devotees of either the left or right-wing. Oh no, we despise any who are politically extreme; George Galloway, Nick Griffin, Ken Livingstone, to name but three. Legendary German punk rock band Slime perfectly summed up politics for us with their 1980 song: ‘Ich Hasse Sie Alle’ (I hate them all.) Spot on.

Equally we are not part of the literary jet set, whose opinions on race are acquired via text books, and are written up from within the safety of pretty

country cottages, away from the friction of our cities. Nope, we are the real thing!

Enclosed is just an honest practical story of how an ordinary couple can make a mixed marriage work. An ordinary Mr and Mrs Smith you might say.

Of course, two other people will have a totally different story to tell, we can only write from the perspective of a white punk rocker married to a black African Princess. We are Bobby and Margaret Smith.

Welcome to our world.