

In Providence: India Point Park



If you find yourself at India Point Park on a humid summer night, you may see them litigating a decades old argument.

“She started the fight. I hate to fight. I do not like to fight. But she started the fight, and I told her, back when she started it, I told her, ‘You start this fight, you’re not going to win.’ And she hasn’t won. We’re still fighting. We do other things, but we come here, and we have a coffee- She has tea. She likes tea. And we fight.”

They met through an ex-girlfriend in 1987 when they were both in their 20s. She had just broken things off with the woman, a waitress who lived near Pawtucket, and they had been dating her and staying at her apartment. That relationship would only last for a few weeks, but they met this fascinating person who loved to start fights, and the two have been friends ever since. They attempted to date in the beginning, but it became clear that they weren’t destined to be lovers — not in any traditional way.

“When we met, I thought I liked women. That was how I saw myself. I had been with a guy and he was a good guy. Nice, nice guy. But he wasn’t for me. I dated women for some years there. Now I date anybody, but I’m not interested in being with anybody but myself. I don’t identify as any gender and

that's new. I got that from my sister's kid, who's non-binary. They started talking to me about it, and I said, 'That sounds like me.' That was in 2019. That was two years ago. This is all new to me, but it feels right."

Their best friend was there for them throughout that period of discovery, but the fight raged on in the quiet way that fights do when they're old enough to have a teenager. Neither one of them will tell me what the fight is about, but I suspect even they don't really remember. What they *do* remember is that, when it began, they stopped talking for a month, and then made a date to get together at India Point Park and talk things out.

"I thought we were going to go sit, talk, and be done with it. No. We never got anywhere, but we said we would keep working on it, because we liked each other. We felt like we belonged in each other's lives. That's the best way I can describe it. It didn't feel like something you wanted to throw away. I think we got dinner that night, or we got dinner the next week, when we got together, and we would fight for a little, then go do something else. We've been doing that for 30 years now."

They've now seen each other through countless relationships, break-ups, bad jobs, and they've attended every Providence Pride together.

"I think it's — we both think it's — a good thing when your soulmate isn't a romantic soulmate. I think people who have a romantic soulmate are lucky, but I think if that's not in the cards for you, then you should look around and see that you already have a soulmate in your life, or somebody who could be one, provided you're not thinking of it as being the person you get married to or have kids with or anything like that. She's my best friend and she's my soulmate. She's the strangest person I've ever met in my life, but I don't know what I would do without her."

So how much time do they devote to fighting in India Point Park now?

"It depends. This week we didn't fight too much. Some weeks it's all we do. I don't think about it as long as she shows up, and she always shows up. Let me tell you something, because you're younger than I am— When you get older, you like routine. You learn that the way you keep people in your life is by getting into a routine with them. That first week when we didn't solve the fight, but we made a date to get back together again the following week— We started a routine. The routine is what kept the friendship going. Some people tell you they haven't talked to a friend in years, and they meet, and they pick right back up where they left off, and I'm not doubting those people. What I will say is that if I met her after 30 years, we might be able to pick up where we left off, but we would have lost 30 years of spending time with each other, and I treasure that time. I was there for her when her mother died. When I lost both my parents, she was there. There's nothing like having somebody who's right there — somebody who shows up. That's important."

Their fight reminds me of the court case in *Bleak House* by Dickens that goes on and on ad infinitum to the point where it seems as though its most vital aspect is that it *won't* ever come to a conclusion. If the fight helped establish a routine that's built around the fight, does that mean the foundation of their friendship is a feud?

"She might not always feel like being friends with me, but she's always wanted to be right. Some weeks we'd be having another fight that was a really serious, that-day-that-minute fight, and I knew she didn't want to see me, but we got this other fight going on we have to take care of, and so she'd come and I'd be there, and some weeks we were juggling a few fights at a time. Those aren't my favorite weeks, but

we get past them.”

If you’re walking through India Point Park, you may see two people sitting together in the midst of a heated argument and think that perhaps a relationship or friendship is on the brink of a collapse. There’s no way you could know that it’s actually just being reaffirmed in the most illogical way possible.

“I think I’m going to win it when all is said and done, but that’s only because I’m going to outlive her. Once that happens, I win. That’s how it works.”

They plan to keep at it until then, because like most good things in life, a soulmate is worth the fight.