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THE INDIE WRITERS' DIGEST

First Feature Issue

IT'S ALL ABOUT ANDY!



Edited by Bryony Petersen

FOREWORD BY THE EDITOR

Readers may recall Andy introduced his book (Didn't Anyone Tell You, It's All A Game?) in the September 2025 issue.



For this issue of the Digest, I want to focus on his remarkable charitable works, published books and future projects.

For some people, doing charitable work is no more than a tick-box exercise. The Andy I know isn't interested in tick-boxes. He goes the extra

mile. He cares deeply about his family, his friends, his community (or tribe in the modern parlance) and helping others. He doesn't 'do' charity for effect. He turns up, does the fund-raising, helps, rolls his sleeves up and gets the job done. When Andy talks about the legacy he wants to leave behind, he really is speaking directly from his heart.

As some readers may know, Andy is a cancer survivor, and he is doing fantastic things to promote and fundraise for cancer charities in the Midlands.

If, like me, you're watching a loved one going through cancer, it's the 'Andy's, if you're lucky enough to have an 'Andy' around you, who keep your chin up. They stop you dissolving into a teary mess and point you towards useful solutions, ways to find the positive, pick you up and have a ready cuppa on hand without asking.

For anyone touched by this devastating disease, people like Andy are hugely important because what they do gives us hope, inspires us and brings both tears and laughter into our lives.

What some won't know is how close to home Andy's story is for me personally, and how much he is helping me through the challenges I and my family are currently facing. So this issue, and those I am planning into the foreseeable future, are particularly special and poignant for me. I hope you will continue to read and support Andy and the fantastic indie writers that will be appearing in the forthcoming issues of the Digest.

"Spared For Another Day" is remarkably insightful, told anecdotally through the lens of childhood memories. It resonated particularly with me because I can recall similar characters living during my own early years and neighbourhood who also professed to have been saved for another day.

Andy closes this feature issue with an excerpt from his second book. He has chosen a particularly pertinent topic for independent writers: the importance of having faith. Andy focuses on his Christian faith and how it has helped him. However, as independent writers, we write alone, in isolation and without the back-up of editors, literary agents or any of the 'perks' of a traditionally published writer. Now, without further ado, and as with the majority of this issue, I'm going to let Andy do the explaining.

Spared for Another Day

When I was a young boy in the early 1970s, there was an elderly gentleman who lived a few doors away. He was in his early sixties, although to me he looked to me as old as time itself, as many of that generation did. Born during the First World War, he had served in the Second. He had spent a lifetime working with heavy machinery and it showed. His hands were thin and weathered, but they still carried a quiet strength that fascinated me. Every time he passed my mother, he would politely doff his cap. He was an old-fashioned gentleman in every sense of the word.

Whenever I talked with him, usually with my parents, he would weave into the conversation the same words.

“I’ve been spared for another day.”

As a young boy, I couldn’t understand what he meant, so I asked my folks. They explained that he believed God had allowed him another day to live.

To my young mind, that sounded frightening. Why would a good man think today might be his last? Why would he speak as though death could arrive at any moment? I interpreted his words as fear.

Now, more than fifty years later, I find myself almost exactly the age he was then. I hope I look a little less weathered, but I understand his words very differently.

He had survived the campaign in the Far East during the Second World War. He had witnessed brutality that few of us can imagine. He had overcome serious illness as a child and spent decades working in heavy industry long before health and safety became a priority. Looking back, I no longer hear fear in his words. I hear gratitude.

He wasn’t expecting to die. He was amazed he was still alive. Each new morning was another gift. Another opportunity to be a husband, father, grandfather, neighbour and friend. He wasn’t boasting about his survival, nor was he dwelling on his hardships. In his own quiet, humble way, he was simply counting his blessings.

Today, at sixty two, I understand exactly what he meant.

My own journey has been vastly different, but it has brought its own challenges, including illness, loss, self-doubt and moments that changed the direction of my life forever. Like that gentleman all those years ago, I too have been spared for another day.

Thanks to the love and encouragement of my wife Catherine, my children and my friends, I’m determined to make every one of those days count. Writing has become part

of that purpose. It has helped me make sense of life, share what I've learned, and, I hope, encourage others to tell their own stories.

Perhaps that's why you're reading this magazine today.

If my journey encourages just one person to pick up a pen, reflect on their own life, or finally begin the story they've always wanted to tell, then another day has been well spent.

So, who is Andy Mullaney?

Andrew J. Mullaney, known as Andy, is a proud family man from the Black Country who now focuses on helping others grow.

After thirty-five years with Lloyds Bank across retail, commercial, corporate and private banking, he stepped away in 2017 to concentrate on consultancy, collaboration and community impact.

Andy is the author of *Didn't Anyone Ever Tell You? It's All A Game!* A practical self-help book about resilience, perspective and navigating life well. The book is written for mentors, mentees and anyone looking to grow through change, with a strong emphasis on mindset and personal responsibility. A proportion of its proceeds support charitable causes close to his heart.

A bowel cancer survivor, Andy openly shares his story to raise awareness, encourage early diagnosis, and support others through tough times. His work across business, community and health has reinforced a simple belief, connection, resilience and hope change lives.

Through mentoring, volunteering, public speaking and bespoke consultancy, he helps individuals and organisations create a lasting, positive difference to our world.

To give you a greater insight into myself as an author, and to really repay Debra's kindness here in giving me a platform to discuss my writing and its impact, I've taken some questions that are pertinent and given honest answers. If you have others and want to know more from me, please reach out via LinkedIn or through this wonderful supportive magazine for independent authors.

Thank you so much in advance for giving your time to read the musings of a bloke who has done a few laps around the block of life.

1. You often say that life is a game. Where did that philosophy come from, and has it changed over the years?

I genuinely believe that life can be viewed as a game. Every day we encounter rules, choices, victories, setbacks, losses and almost every emotion imaginable. The difference is that, unlike a board game, many of us play life without ever realising we're playing.

Too often, we react only in the moment. We don't pause to consider the consequences of our next move. Yet when we play games like Snakes and Ladders or chess, we think ahead, assess the risks and try to improve our chances of success. Life deserves the same level of thought.

Of course, we can't control every roll of the dice. Unexpected things happen to all of us. But we can influence far more than we often believe through our attitude, our preparation and the decisions we make. The more conscious we become, the more likely we are to achieve better outcomes, not just for ourselves but for our families, our communities and society as a whole.

This philosophy has developed over many years. It was only after I finished contracted work in 2017 and had the time to reflect that I began to properly understand what I believed. Writing my first book, *"Didn't Anyone Ever Tell You? It's All a Game! Surviving and Sometimes Winning at Life"* forced me to put those thoughts into words.

Interestingly, writing the book didn't change my philosophy, it actually strengthened it.

I'm not suggesting we should analyse every second of every day. That would be exhausting and we'd lose the joy of spontaneity. But I do believe that if we are a little more aware of the game or games we're playing, we give ourselves a much better chance of living a happier, more fulfilling and more meaningful life.

2. You've worked as a banker, community connector, volunteer, public speaker and author. Which role has taught you the most about people?

The honest answer is that you never stop learning from people. They are our greatest opportunity and, at times, our greatest challenge.

Despite being more connected than ever before, we still struggle to communicate effectively. We make assumptions, we think others understand our perspective, and we sometimes forget that everyone is playing their own version of the game of life.

As a banker, I quickly learned that there was a stark difference between having customers and having clients. Customers transact and often focus on price. Clients are built through trust, relationships and understanding. That principle applies to every organisation, whether it is a manufacturing business, a service provider or a community group. I only ever wanted clients

During my leadership career, I always tried to get people to believe in my vision, to support my ideas and achieve together. I believe that I was a good leader. I genuinely cared about people, created opportunities and tried to build enthusiasm and cohesion. Looking back though, I probably found my greatest strength was being a second in command, helping turn someone else's vision into a reality.

That changed when I discovered my true calling working in the community. Freed from some of the corporate structures and restrictions, I found I could really flourish. My biggest lesson was that people don't need to be forced into a blueprint. They need to be encouraged to be themselves, because independence, creativity and different perspectives are where real energy comes from.

Volunteering has taught me another important lesson. Volunteers are the glue that holds our society together. They give their time because they believe in something. For some it is a calling, for others it is about purpose, and for some it is simply about making a difference. The challenge for every volunteer led organisation is creating an environment where people feel ownership while still respecting the mission and boundaries. I have seen great people leave great causes because that balance was lost.

As an author and public speaker, I now have the privilege of helping people tell their stories. What continues to amaze me is how many people fail to recognise the positive impact they have on others. They are often too humble or too quick to deflect praise. I love bringing these stories into the public arena and shining a light on just what it is possible to be.

Perhaps that is also why one of the themes I explore at the end of my first book is how so many get thrown off course by the impact of "energy terrorists, toxic friends, the psycho boss and a few time thieves." Life throws people and situations at us that can disrupt our confidence and our direction. The more aware we become of those influences, the better equipped we are to protect our own game plan.

Ultimately, every role I've had has taught me the same thing. People matter. Understanding them, encouraging them and helping them to realise their true potential is one of the greatest privileges we can ever have.

3. Your cancer diagnosis changed your life. How has it changed your writing?

This is a great question because it is something I have become increasingly conscious of.

Before my cancer diagnosis, I never imagined I would write a second book. I genuinely believed my first book would be my only contribution. Then bowel cancer arrived, and unexpectedly, writing became a source of comfort, reflection and purpose.

Very early on post my diagnosis, I decided I didn't want cancer to define me. I wanted to challenge it, to expose it for the mental bully it can become, and to use the one thing I knew I could do, writing, to help others who may be facing their own battles.

My second book has also allowed me to become more open and more of myself as a writer. My first book, on reflection, was perhaps more structured and educational. With the second, I have felt able to be more conversational, more empathetic and allow more of my humour and personality to come through.

It has also given me greater confidence when listening to and sharing other people's stories effectively. I still feel incredibly privileged when someone opens up to me. Everyone has a story, and every story has value.

One thing that has never changed is my commitment to the reader. I believe every writer should put themselves in the shoes of the person reading their words. Don't lose people in unnecessary detail, complicated language or what I call "word salads." Communicate clearly, honestly and with purpose.

For me, writing has always been about connection. Cancer didn't change that. What it did was remind me how important that connection can be.

4. Many writers talk about finding their voice. When did you realise what yours was?

This may sound like a contradiction to some of my earlier thoughts about being more conscious, but I've never consciously looked for a writing voice. I've simply tried to be myself.

From the very beginning, I wanted readers to feel as though they could hear me speaking the words. I use good English, but I don't believe, as I have said previously, that writing has to be filled with complicated vocabulary or clever sounding phrases to have an impact. In fact, I think the opposite is often true.

I write from the heart, with honesty, common sense and empathy. If I'm explaining an idea or sharing an experience, I try to present it in the way I would want someone to explain it to me. Perhaps that's my voice?

If readers come away thinking, "Andy sounds just like the person who's written these pages," then I've succeeded. Better still, if they think, "If Andy can write a book, maybe I can too," then I've achieved something even more valuable.

Every author's style is unique. Mine isn't something I deliberately created. It has simply evolved from being authentic, and I'm extremely comfortable with that. I wouldn't want to sound like anyone else.

5. You write about difficult subjects without becoming gloomy. Is that a conscious decision?

Absolutely. The world already has enough voices focusing on what's wrong. I don't ignore life's difficulties, but I do believe we have a choice in how we present them. My aim has never been to leave people feeling hopeless. I want them to finish reading with a greater sense of optimism than when they started.

Throughout my career, I've spent time as both a coach and a mentor. Coaching helps people improve what they do. Mentoring helps people understand themselves and why they do it. Both have shaped the way I write because I've learned that encouragement is far more powerful than criticism if you genuinely want people to grow.

While writing my second book, I interviewed a medical professional who said something that has stayed with me ever since. She said, "Wherever possible, I want to keep people in a place of hope." I love that phrase.

As writers, we have an enormous responsibility. The words we choose, whether in a book, an article or even in a straightforward text message, can influence how someone feels, thinks and acts. Sometimes they can even change a life for better, or for worse. Think of that and then you get the weight many do carry, especially I believe those who write nonfiction self help books.

That doesn't mean pretending everything is wonderful. Life can be incredibly hard. We all experience loss, disappointment and suffering. But I believe our role is to help people navigate those moments, not leave them stranded there.

I want my writing to encourage people, reveal possibilities, build compassion and remind them that tomorrow can be different from today. I want readers to believe they are capable of more than they think.

Perhaps that's why I've always almost always been a glass half full sort of person? Not because life is easy, but because hope is powerful.

6. What have readers told you that has surprised or moved you the most?

This is probably the easiest question in the interview.

One reader told me that my first book had changed their life for the better. Another said that one of my LinkedIn posts encouraged them to seek medical advice much sooner than they otherwise would have.

How do you respond to that? Those moments stay with you forever. They remind me that writing isn't simply about putting words on a page. It's about reaching another human being at exactly the right moment. Sometimes you never know who is reading your work or what they may be going through.

Those experiences have reinforced why I write. I want to change someone's stars. I want to encourage people to think differently, to act sooner, to believe more in themselves and, if possible, to leave the world better than I found it.

Every reader matters. Every story matters. Every life matters!!

To know that something I have written has made a genuine difference to another person is both deeply humbling and profoundly moving. I don't think I'll ever take that privilege for granted.

I've always believed that success is measured by more than what we keep. Sometimes it's measured by what we're able to give or gift away.

If my books can leave readers with hope and communities with practical support, then I feel they've achieved exactly what I wanted them to.

7. You donate half of your book royalties to charity. Why was that important to you from the beginning?

When I began writing my first book, I wanted to leave a legacy that was about more than words on a page. If the book could encourage people and also provide practical support to charities and community groups, then it could make a difference in more ways than one.

I knew from the outset that the sums involved were unlikely to be huge. Very few authors make their fortune from writing, particularly when they choose to self publish. But I also knew that even relatively modest donations can have a significant impact for smaller charities, where every pound really does matter.

I was fortunate to be in a position where I could afford to self publish, and I felt that came with a responsibility. If my books generated an income, I wanted part of that income to help others. Self publishing also teaches you a great deal about the economics of the book trade. Some retailers can take commissions of up to 60 percent of the selling price, so every copy an author sells directly not only improves their own return but, in my case, also increases the amount that can be donated to good causes.

I originally committed to donating 25 percent of my royalties. After a couple of years, I increased that to 50 percent, and I've made the same commitment with my second book.

This time, though, the decision carries even greater meaning.

Following my bowel cancer diagnosis and treatment, I wanted to give something back to the people who quite literally helped save my life. The principal beneficiary of my second book is the hospital charity that supports the teams who cared for me. Working alongside them to promote the book feels like a small way of expressing my gratitude.

8. What's the biggest misconception people have about writing a book?

From my experience as a volunteer author ambassador for Troubador Publishing, and from conversations with many first-time authors, I think the biggest misconception is the self doubt.

People often ask themselves: "Is my work good enough?" "Will anyone beyond my friends and family want to read it?" "Is the whole process too complicated?" Perhaps this is why only 2% of manuscripts written and completed make it to publication.

The truth is that bringing a book to life is more achievable than many people imagine. The biggest challenge is not necessarily the publishing process, it is writing the manuscript and getting it into the best possible shape before anyone else sees it.

From there, it becomes a journey of collaboration. Working with a publisher, understanding your budget, making decisions about presentation and creating the right shop window for your work. The cover is especially important. It is often the first thing that makes someone stop, pick up your book and consider buying it from an author they may have never heard of.

There are different routes available. Some publishers offer hybrid models where they share some of the costs, while others choose to explore traditional publishing through literary agents. That route can work, but it can also be unpredictable.

For me, if you want complete control over your work and the outcome, self publishing can be a hugely rewarding route. The biggest challenge then arrives: marketing.

Almost every author I speak to agrees on this point. Writing the book is only part of the journey. Every sale is hard won, and you have to be prepared to become your own biggest supporter.

But my biggest piece of advice is simple. Remember why you started. Don't lose the joy of creating. Have pride in your work, cheer yourself on, share your story and, most importantly, have some fun along the way.

9. You often write from lived experience. Do you ever worry about making yourself too vulnerable?

When you put your work into the world, you create a vulnerability that every author and creative person will recognise. There is always a degree of self doubt and, occasionally, a little fear. Even the most confident people have moments where they wonder how their work will be received.

When you add firsthand experiences involving pain, distress, mistakes you have made, your own faults and something as life changing as a cancer diagnosis, that vulnerability naturally increases.

For me though, if I want to leave a legacy and pass the baton on in better shape than I received it, then I believe I have a responsibility to share what I can. My hope is that others can learn from my experiences, avoid some of my mistakes and perhaps feel less alone in their own challenges.

That doesn't mean only sharing the difficult moments. I think balance is important. Life contains pain, but it also contains joy, humour, kindness and incredible moments of connection.

I have always tried to be open, although I recognise that at times I may have shared more than some people would. With my second book especially, I wanted to show that bowel cancer may affect your body, but it doesn't have to control your mind. The mental battle is often where the greatest challenges are faced, and by exposing the fears and tactics it uses, you begin to take away some of its power.

As human beings, we are often exceptionally good at hiding, masking and deflecting the things that hurt us. We protect ourselves, sometimes even from ourselves.

By choosing to be more open in my writing, I have found that I haven't become weaker. The opposite has happened. I've been able to release some of the baggage created by those experiences and turn them into something positive.

Everyone has a choice about what they share. For me, embracing vulnerability has made me a better person and I believe a more authentic writer.

10. If someone says, “I’d love to write a book one day”, what’s the first piece of advice you give them?

Just do it. Write, write and write.

The biggest mistake many people make is thinking too much about the finished book before they have even started. Don’t worry about editing every sentence as you go. Don’t worry about whether it is perfect. The first job is simply to get your ideas out of your head and onto the page.

Carry a notebook. Keep a journal. Write a blog. Record thoughts on your phone. Use whatever method works for you to capture those moments of inspiration. You never know when an idea that seems insignificant today will become an important part of your story tomorrow.

Never throw anything away. Save your notes, drafts and random thoughts somewhere safe. It is amazing how something you once thought was irrelevant can suddenly become the missing piece that brings your writing together. I understand this is especially true for fiction writers, where a small idea, character or observation can eventually become a major part of the story.

Most importantly, don’t worry too much about how it looks, reads or sounds at the beginning. That comes later. The first step is the creation.

And enjoy it, remembering that the blank page in front of you has no judgement. It is yours to own, yours to explore and yours to fill with the story that only you can tell.

11. Has writing changed you as a person, or has it simply revealed who you already were?

As an intense student of myself, this is a very deep question, and perhaps one that would be better answered by the people closest to me. But I will give it a try.

The honest answer is yes, in some ways.

I came to writing seriously at the age of 55. By then, I was probably close to the person I had always become. I wasn’t looking to create a new identity or reinvent myself. I already knew my values, what I stood for and the way I wanted to contribute to the world.

What writing has done, particularly through exploring my own experiences, is create space for deeper reflection. Writing nonfiction that draws on your own life requires a level of honesty and introspection that many of us rarely allow ourselves.

Through that process, I have discovered things about myself that I appreciate more than I realised. I have also uncovered areas where I needed to challenge myself, change my thinking or resolve some internal conflicts.

Those discoveries are personal, and some things are mine alone to work through.

But there is one thing I do know...If the seven-year-old boy from the beginning of this story could meet the sixty-two-year-old man I am today, I would like to think he would be proud, not because life has been perfect, but because I have tried to make the most of the many privileges I've been afforded.

12. Which chapter or passage from your books means the most to you personally, and why?

This is a difficult question because every chapter means something to me. Writing is a very personal process, and every word feels hard won as you battle with yourself, your memories and that constant desire to make your work as good as it can possibly be. Perfectionism can take over.

If I had to choose, I would highlight two chapters that are incredibly special to me.

In my second book, Chapter 4, *God, Me and Junction One*, is a chapter I am particularly proud of. It reflects my own journey to faith and something that has become increasingly important in my life. Writing honestly about that journey was both challenging and deeply personal.

From my first book, I would choose the chapter that tells the stories of people in my local communities who quietly make an enormous difference. These are people who often go unnoticed, yet they give so much of themselves to others. Their stories reminded me that ordinary people can have an extraordinary impact.

Perhaps the reason I struggle to choose between them is that, at their heart, both chapters are about the same thing: connection. One explores my relationship with faith; the other celebrates the contribution people make to the lives of others.

Ultimately, though, every reader will take something different from my books. The chapters that mean the most to me may not be the ones that speak most strongly to someone else.

And that, for me, is one of the wonderful things about writing. Once a book is shared, part of the story belongs to the reader too.

13. What do you hope readers remember long after they've finished one of your books?

I hope they remember that we often make life more complicated than it needs to be.

We have more influence over our own journey than we sometimes realise. We cannot



control everything that happens to us, but we can influence how we respond, the choices we make and the outcomes we work towards. Developing greater awareness and consciousness of the game we are playing can help us create better lives for ourselves and those around us.

I also hope readers remember the examples of people overcoming adversity and the importance of creating a positive, values-based contribution to the world.

One of the most rewarding things has been seeing how different people connect with different parts of my books. A number of young people, along with their parents, guides and mentors, have told me that Chapter 17 of my first book, which

explores the “dark art” of interviews and how to prepare and present yourself for the wider world, has been particularly valuable.

What has amused and encouraged me also is that it isn't just younger readers who have found value in it. I have even had a company director, approaching retirement, tell me that they learned something from that chapter too.

For me, that is the magic of writing. A book can reach people at different stages of life and offer something unique to each reader.

Ultimately, I hope people finish my books believing they can become the best or a better version of themselves, whatever their circumstances. I hope they recognise that support is available, that communities are full of people who care, and that none of us has to navigate life's challenges completely alone.

14. If this were the final page you ever wrote, what would you want it to say about your life?

That he made his parents, his family, his friends and his communities proud.

That he tried to make a positive difference in the world, encouraged others and left things a little better than he found them.

That he used his experiences, both good and difficult, to help others and created a legacy that continued beyond his own lifetime.

Not a legacy built on fame or fortune, but one built on people and community.

Sounds a bit cheesy but it is from my very heart and soul.



15. Where can readers get your books and connect with you to learn more about your work?

I would love readers to visit my publisher site, Troubador, where they can buy my books directly. Purchasing through them means I can maximise the support I am able to give to the charities and causes that are so important to me.

<https://troubador.co.uk/author/andrew-j-mullaney>

I've also written a free to download essay on what I call "The Covid Gap" which I would include if I ever rewrote book one.

[MIND THE GAP PLEASE...THE COVID GAP! By Andrew J. Mullaney 2026 Final.pdf](#)

If you would like to follow me more closely, share ideas or simply connect, my main social media platform is LinkedIn. It's where I share my thoughts, experiences, writing and the stories of people who inspire me among so much more. I would be delighted to connect with you there.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/andy-mullaney-b6259693>

 PROUD MEMBER Association of Mental Health First Aiders Dudley Group NHS Charity	Andy Mullaney Mentor, Coach, Connector and Author of the “Didn’t Anyone Ever Tell You?” Series. Book 1. “It’s All A Game!” Book 2 (now ready for pre order) “Never Trust A Fart!” <i>Surviving and beating bowel cancer!</i>	 
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CHAPTER 4. GOD, ME AND JUNCTION ONE

“Above all, cancer is a spiritual practice that teaches me about faith and resilience”.

Kris Carr

For those of you who are nonbelievers or have no particular religious views, maybe even agnostic, I ask that you bear with me here. This isn't an easy piece to write, and I've deliberated for many hours whether to include this or not. I've also debated with myself as to how I should write it, whether from an almost apologetic point of view through to a version that is directly from my heart and soul.

I've decided to write it in the way that I have, which is somewhere in between. This is the final incarnation of it, and in writing it this way, I am being completely true to myself and my whole cancer experience.

This chapter steps away somewhat from the medical side, where I'm trying to help as many as possible to understand what may come with a diagnosis and beyond, what to expect and how to make the best of things. The words that follow will, I know, help some, and others it may not. I'll leave it to you, the reader, to decide, but please know this: I am so much happier and content within myself for including it in this way.

I've always had a belief in God or at the very least in a superior being. My parents were strong believers, although they did make God something of a fearful character for me. This is true of many of my generation, who were born in the post-war era. Add to that, at middle school, we had an assembly every day, singing hymns and being told that fire and damnation awaited us should we transgress from the ways of the Lord. Heavy stuff for eleven- and twelve-year-olds. This applied no matter what religion you were, too. As a result, I always held religion at arm's length, more frightened of it than anything else, but I always have believed.

I referred to this in the first book and included a chapter called “Finding your religion... or not!”

My true conscious awakening to God came during the writing of book one, when, and without going into all of the details, I was sat in an emergency ward at 3am hoping that someone very close to me would pull through. It was an exceptionally long night and, at one point, I found myself praying. In that moment, a peace came over me that I simply cannot describe as anything other than a feeling of love, safety and compassion. I genuinely felt as though I was being held, and that in, many ways, things were going to be OK, no matter what.

During the coming years, I spoke about this at length with two remarkably close friends, Andy Moss and Stephen Dunster, who I have already mentioned earlier and are both men of faith. They are people who have helped me immensely as I have tried to better understand more of my relationship with Christianity and God especially.

In January of 2024, I began to attend the church that Stephen and his wife Rachael had planted, called Junction One, an evangelical church. I never knew that you don't build a church, you plant it. In this case, at that time, in the village hall in Burcot near to Bromsgrove in Worcestershire, about seven miles from where I live.

The welcome on my first visit was simply overwhelming. I was met at the door by a lady called Louisa, who just exudes happiness, warmth and joy. “You must be Andy, Stephen's friend,” she said, with a huge smile, and then gave me a big hug. “We've been praying for you and your loved ones for so long, it's lovely to finally meet you. Welcome.” She then named all of us, who she had held in her heart, and that, to me, showed just how alive we were in her world. A very humbling and emotional moment. It moved me massively because she was so genuine and I did just about hold it together. It still makes me emotional now as I think about it.

Wow! So, many people that I didn't know, had no connection to – except for Stephen – knew me, were praying for me, praying for us and happily welcomed me into their place of worship? There must be a catch. I'm a tad cynical and often think there's rarely something for nothing. Perhaps it's the lifetime of working in finance that makes me suspicious of people and their underling motives.

There were coffee and cake on offer, and several people came up and gave me a warm handshake and more unexpected hugs, in some cases. I felt as though I'd come to a type of home, being swept away on this tide of love but, at the same time, kept my defences up as surely this was how they get you reeled in only to follow this with a lengthy list of conditions.

As I write this chapter, after almost two years of attending, I can honestly say that there is no catch, and it is an unconditional non-judgemental relationship. I have found what is commonly called these days as “my tribe”, and what a tribe it is, full of love, kindness, generosity of spirit and a desire to lift everyone, no matter who they are or where they come from. Someone who attends for the first time is made as welcome as I was. It's consistent, without prejudice and all based around a message of Christianity, God's word and the belief that Jesus Christ died on the cross for us, for our sins and our shame and that he will come back to us again. Not complex and certainly not scary either. OK, so that all may feel a bit heavy for some, but it does, in some way, set the scene for what follows.

Let's go back to 9pm on the Saturday night, two days after my surgery. The doctor had left, leaving me with a tube from my nose to drain my stomach. A nurse came and checked my blood pressure, and it was unusually high, my pulse was racing, and I started to run a hot temperature. I suddenly felt quite ill and, in no time at all, I had a couple of nurses fussing around me. All I wanted to do was sleep.

Now, what I'm about to describe is how I recall the specific events. They may not have happened in this way or with this exact timeline but, in my memory, this is how it's permanently imprinted.

As the nurses were connecting another drip, giving me an injection and reconnecting me up to the monitor, I went into a deep sleep and into a form of dreaming.

Before I'd gone into hospital, I'd told Catherine and my kids that if I were to die, I'd like my ashes, if possible, scattered towards the top of the Clent Hills, a local National Trust beauty spot near to where we live. From there, you can see a wonderful panorama that gives views for almost fifty miles on a sunny day. At the highest point, you can see my place of birth, West Bromwich; the top of Halesowen through to Hurst Green near to Quinton, where I grew up; Stourbridge, where I've lived most of my adult life and so much of my beloved Black Country and beyond. I wasn't being morbid here, just very practical. It's a conversation I feel you must have with your loved ones.

In my dream, I was walking towards the top of the hills, accompanied by another man. I do not know who he was and I couldn't describe him, but I knew that I was safe in his company. I was wearing my favourite navy-blue Jaeger suit that I used to wear for work. It was totally inappropriate given the fact that it's a countryside path, but that's dreams for you. We emerged from the path to a good vantage point, and I think we were talking about my life.

Suddenly, I woke up, and there were more medical people talking to me. There was a beeping noise, and then instantly I'm back into the dream at the very point where I left off. I was struggling to understand what my reality was. Was it me in hospital, or actually on the hills with this guy who was listening to me?

I was talking to the man in real depth about some of my regrets, things I'd not done so well and could have done better, and about some things that I am immensely proud of. He was listening very intently, and we then sat down on a bench looking out towards The Wrekin in Shropshire. It's an incredibly beautiful vista, and one I've seen countless times, but never in this much detail. Every single aspect had more clarity, more depth, more colour and was incredibly beautiful to behold. My reflection on this now is that this conversation was probably my confession, my own admission of my faults, my sins, my own shame and also celebrating some of my victories too.

And then I'd wake up again, hear some more voices, see some more activity in my room, and go back into the dream. This happened several times over what I guess was a near four-hour period.

By this time, in my head, we were sat on a bench just staring at the beauty that was around us. I turned around and saw some people I had known and loved, who have passed, walk down the hill towards me. They were all familiar but young, smartly dressed in their Sunday best, almost formal like me, and seemingly happy. I saw my parents, arm in arm, and they waved; my Uncle John, free of his Parkinson's and youthful again, as I knew him when I was a child; my friend Richard, and many others. All were pleased to see me, waved and walked on, but no one stopped. All except for my Uncle Bill, who came up to me, put his hand on my shoulder, shook my hand and told me we would have a long chat at some stage, but not yet. He walked away with a wink and a nod, quickly trying to catch up to the others. I wanted to get up and follow them but felt almost glued to the spot I was sat on. Oh, how I wanted to go with them.

And then I woke up. I desperately wanted to be back into the dream, to that place that felt so real. It was warm there. The sun was shining, everywhere was peaceful, calm and I felt truly loved. So, I shut my eyes and... nothing. That particular door had been closed. Even now, writing this, I can still feel its intensity and, in some ways, I do really miss it. I hope I'm there again in that form one day, but certainly not yet.

A nurse who was next to me said, "Andrew. Andrew, are you awake? Are you OK?" It was a profoundly serious enquiry from someone who looked genuinely concerned. I was connected to some monitors and had more fluids going into me.

I was confused. I said, "Yes, I am awake, I think. And I feel kind of OK. I'm just very tired."

"You've had us all worried," she said. "You've been quite poorly."

I later found out that they were concerned I was developing peritonitis, which was mentioned earlier that night when I was swelling up. Untreated, it would have been fatal.

I went back into a really deep sleep after talking with another of the support team but remember nothing of it. I'd finally woken at 2am and several hours had elapsed as I went in and out of the dream. I even took a selfie to prove to myself I was still alive. This may have also been a contributory factor to the dislodging of my tube... Enough said on that.

So, here's where the truly remarkable story develops, and this is what still makes the hairs stand up on the back of my neck, even today.

My Uncle Bill died six years before I was born from leukaemia. I never met him, heard his voice or knew him other than from family stories. He was a young man, recently married, tall, handsome and always smartly dressed. I have only ever seen a few pictures of him, and the last time I thought of him was a few months earlier when I was sorting through some pictures in the loft.

As I said, this is my memory of that night, and it is etched into my mind forever.

So, what do you call this? Some form of message, a vision, my own version of heaven, a chance, coincidence, a story? Many will have different ways of interpreting what I've written and even dismiss it as just a story. Some will embrace it, and I hope you, the reader, will have some sympathy with the challenge that I have faced in getting this over to you without sounding like I had some intense near-death, life-changing experience.

For me, this time I had, in what you could possibly call another dimension, confirmed to me that there is more to us as spiritual beings and that there is so much more beyond our own mortal existence. This is what I have taken from it, and it gives me an immense sense of peace, hope, well-being and strength. My faith is stronger for it, there is no doubting that, and with that, too, comes a desire to be around others of a like mind so much more. I have nothing but total respect for every viewpoint that people have about their beliefs and faith, and ask only the same in return. I'm understanding more of my relationship with God, and, within that, coming to know more of who Andrew James Mullaney really is, what he can do and who he can truly be.

THE FINAL WORD!

“Well, that’s all folks!” That’s the phrase that concluded one of my favourite shows from my childhood. Life was simpler then. We didn’t have computers, iPhones or any of the social media platforms, but I think we enjoyed life and our communities more.

I truly hope you have enjoyed reading this feature issue. In my humble opinion, Andy Mullaney is a very remarkable human, all the more so because he is so humble. He doesn’t see how special he really is because, like every other charitable person I have met, he does what he does for others. The cause is what matters to him, and achieving the result is what matters. How much he personally did towards the cause and the result is immaterial to him. It’s the same consideration for his fellow humans that motivates some to serve their country in the military, or in hospitals and hospices.

For the next feature issue, the Indie Writers’ Digest will be focusing on Gordon McMurray, who is a new writer to the Digest. I am excited for the Digest to showcase his writing, so watch this space!

BRYONY PETERSEN

Bryony Petersen is an independent writer of several books. The Indie Writers’ Digest aims to be a platform for independent writers to promote their writing and writing journey.