



## Interview with Tez Ilyas

# “Value experiences in life over money”

It has been a depressing time where Blackburn was portrayed in the national media in a negative light after the tragic shooting of 19 year old student Aya Hachem.

However an interview with **Blackburn born comedian Tez Ilyas** delivered a message of hope and inspiration for the pupils of Pleckgate High School.

Tez gave his time freely and proved to be honest, charming, down to earth and of course very funny.

Tez credits his Muslim faith and upbringing from his parents with developing his strong morals and work ethic.

The jobs he has done include call centres, paper rounds, summer camps and being a steward at his beloved Blackburn Rovers.

The sharp Blackburn wit and sense of humour has influenced his comedy style, “the dry humour of my Dad and the people of Blackburn inspires me the most!”

One childhood memory sums up the Blackburn “Ripping” humour that is part of Tez and his comedy, see if you can think of the answer by the end of this interview...

**“Why was Shampoo Man the nickname of a man on Whalley Range?”**



## School life

After starting at Cedars Infant School and St Barnabas & St Pauls Primary School, Tez went to secondary school at Witton Park High School following in his father’s footsteps.

Tez describes himself as an “obnoxious kid” who would not shut up and was put on report a number of times!

Despite this, his strong morals meant that Tez always did well in exams and did his best to keep his friends out of trouble and fights, always letting them copy his homework.

On one “Mish” (mission) with his boys they were chased out of Witton woods by a farmer with a shotgun!

In hindsight Tez believes this behaviour was due to the lack of outlets for his creative energy and trying to follow the Asian stereotype of going into medicine, meaning he dropped drama in year 9.

Tez came through unscathed and his ambition to be a doctor motivated him to be really successful in his **GCSE exams achieving 6 A’s 4B’s and 1 C – As Tez said the equivalent of Level 9’s now, because exams were harder back then!!! Lol.**

## College Life

Tez believes he took the easy option by going to Blackburn College to study A-Levels rather than getting out of his comfort zone and pushing by accepting a place at Clitheroe Royal Grammar School.

Tez was more quiet and withdrawn at college and believes people who knew him then would be amazed that he is now a confident comedy performer. Tez lost his way and did not achieve the grades he needed to study medicine at University but what he saw as a failure at the time was actually a step on the road to happiness and success, **"messing up my A-levels made my life great in the end!"**

## Lancaster University

Escaping from the "Blackburn bubble" and living away from home at Lancaster University allowed Tez to come out of his shell and be himself for the first time in his life. Meeting open-minded people from a wide range of cultures, races and backgrounds developed his confidence, character and personality. Tez enjoyed University life enjoying socialising and dancing but always stayed true to his Muslim beliefs never drinking alcohol, even if his dancing looked like he had!!!

## A working class hero is something to be!

Tez believes passionately that all pupils but particularly those from a working-class background should grasp any opportunities in life like getting involved in creative subjects and trips.

Tez recognises that it's difficult for working class pupils to take the plunge without the safety net of cash from parents that middle class students have. This is illustrated by Tez's return from Camp America in New York City. After this life changing experience Tez landed at Heathrow airport with only £6, a dead mobile phone and two heavy suitcases but had to get home Blackburn. Tez showed his resilience and ingenuity by paying £3 for the Tube from Heathrow to Euston then hid in the toilet for the train journey back to Preston. A £3 train ticket got him from Preston to Blackburn, but then at Blackburn station he got on a bus that drops him off near his house, and blagged to the bus driver that he had, "just returned from a tour of Iraq!" (he pretended to be in the army!) so the kindly driver drove him home for free.

## London Calling

Working as a Civil Servant for the Home Office in London was another amazing experience with the highlight being involved in organising the amazingly successful 2012 London Olympics.

Tez feels that this event brought the country together before the turmoil and division of Brexit. London is an exciting but also lonely place and in 2010 Tez joined a stand-up workshop as a hobby. After six weeks of two-hour sessions, he had the confidence and tried his hand in the terrifying world of stand-up comedy.

Gradually he realised his "motormouth" that got him into trouble at school made people laugh. By 2016 what started as a hobby was earning him enough money so he could quit as a civil servant and become a professional comedian.

Tez has enjoyed success on a number of TV and radio shows with pilot for a comedy called "Bounty" on Channel 4 set in Blackburn.

Tez is not afraid to keep it real and tackles difficult subjects like integration and Islamophobia, as best showcased in his honest, intelligent and hilarious TEDx Talk, "Made In Britain" which has over 150,000 views on YouTube.

## **Final Thought**

Tez believes passionately in the importance of being open-minded and that people must value, "experiences over money" like many Muslims do when they invest money in going on Hajj at least once in their lifetime. People especially teenagers should not be scared to get out of their comfort zone and try new experiences, if he hadn't he would not be the happy, successful man he is today. Don't fear failure it is often simply a step on the road to success.

This attitude along with his Muslim background, the love and support of his parents and life in Blackburn have led him to have an amazing life with friends from all races and religions all around the world.

**Oh, and the reason why the man in Whalley Range was nicknamed Shampoo Man?**

**"Because he was bald innit."**