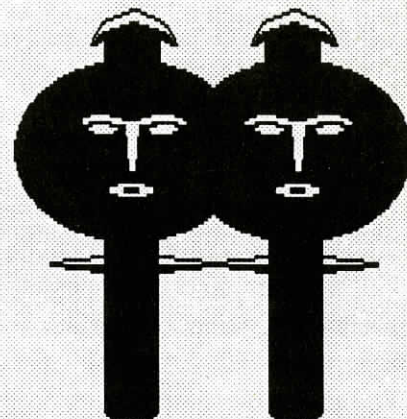


# Black Lesbian & Gay Centre

BM Box 4390, London WC1N 3XX

071.732.3885 (office)

Newsletter: June/July 1993



## national news

### Fascist rally quashed.

On the announcement of a demonstration organised by the British Nationalist Party (BNP), a number of groups and organisations, including the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) and Lesbians and Gays Against Racism and Fascism (LGCARF) arranged for a counter demonstration to take place.

The BNP's march was masquerading under the banner of ``Hang IRA Terrorists'' but as Claire Dissington of the ANL said: ``The IRA is really not the issue on this march. It's just an excuse to whip up hatred. Gays and lesbians have often been the target of BNP attacks, such as when they attacked the Queers on the Pier day in Brighton last year.''

Only about 200 fascists turned up, to be met by 1 500 counter demonstrators and a large police presence. The fascists wanted to have their final rally in Marble Arch but were forced to go to Pimlico Square. Counter demonstrators got to the square to find the fascists getting onto buses out of

### Major change in council housing policies

The British government has announced major changes in its council housing policy with regard to same sex couples. The Department of the Environment is to issue guidelines to local authorities instructing them to treat same sex couples the same as heterosexuals. The change means that gay partners will no longer face eviction from council flats.

### BLGC DEFINITION OF BLACK

*All lesbians and gay men descended (through one or both parents) from Africa, Asia (ie. the Middle East to China, including the Pacific nations) and Latin America, and lesbians and gay men descended from the original inhabitants of Australasia, North America and the islands of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.*

## international news

### Gay weddings for Hawaii?

In Hawaii, the Supreme Court ruled that the state was guilty of discrimination against a gay couple who it refused to grant a marriage licence.

This decision means that if the state wants to refuse gay couples marriage licences it must prove that there is a compelling state interest in refusing a licence and that there is no other way that compelling interest may be served. Effectively the fight for gay marriages is won.

The decision was based not on privacy but on sex discrimination - an approach that has never before got anywhere in securing lesbian and gay rights.

The implications are that there could be knock on effects across the US as all states are bound to recognise one another's marriages.



## New lesbian group in India

Sakhi has been formed in India. It is a support network for lesbians, and has its base in Delhi. Apparently it is the first openly lesbian group of its kind in India. Homosexuality remains illegal there although it is not known how strictly the law is enforced or how the group might be affected.

Sakhi hopes to alleviate the isolation felt by lesbians by starting a letter writing network. They have received a number of letters from women in small towns but none from other major towns in India.

In November of last year Sakhi protested over homophobia alongside other Asian lesbians and gays. They have even had a television interview.

Sakhi also wants to start a resource centre to get lesbian materials and a guest room list for travellers. Cash is short and donations can be sent to Sakhi, PO Box 7032, Srinivaspuri, New Delhi, 110065, India.

## Jewish lesbian and gay conference

The World Congress of Jewish Gays and Lesbians held its first full meeting during the 13th International Conference of Jewish Gays and Lesbians. Over 460 people attended. The conference agreed that it was necessary to start a campaign against the Israeli government who intend to ban Jewish people who are HIV positive

from moving to Israel from other western countries.

Delegates at the conference came from US, Canada, France, the UK, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Russia, Sweden, Belgium and Germany.

Jack Culbert of the Jewish lesbian and gay helpline said: "It was most uplifting that in most countries with few exceptions we heard that relationships between the straight Jewish community and gay Jews are improving."

## HIV news

### Don't test with Dr. Tex!

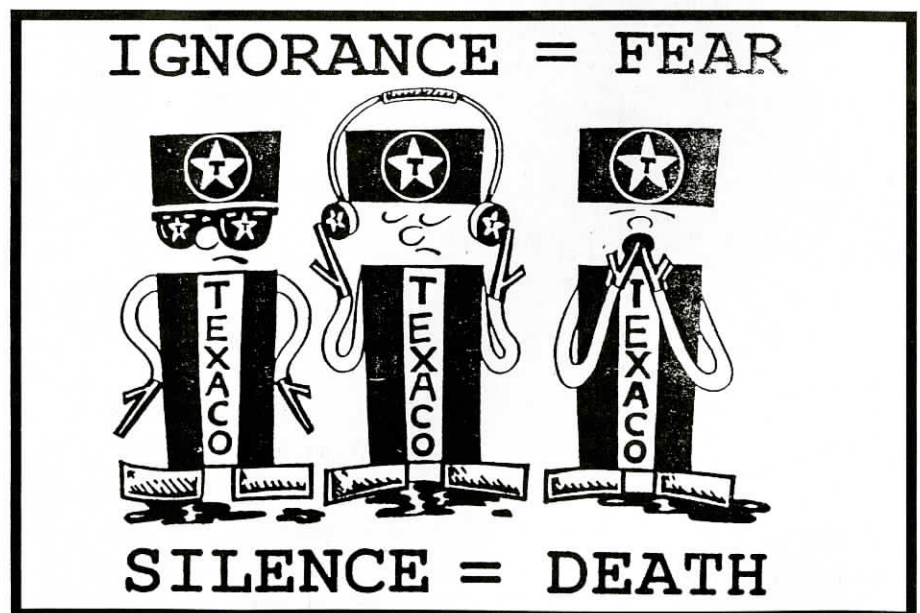
ACT UP are urging people to boycott all Texaco services in the UK for their policy of enforcing compulsory HIV tests on all prospective employees.

Most employers are now realising that there is no risk of HIV being transmitted in the workplace during everyday working practices. They understand that being HIV Positive has

no effect on performance and that the employee can offer many years of service.

The Department of Employment discourages pre - employment screening on the grounds that it is "unnecessary and ineffective". Other supporters of this view include: Health and Safety Executive; Health Education Authority; CBI; National Aids Trust; Institute of Personnel Management; TUC; Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS). There is however, no law against pre - employment testing.

In addition, 'Companies act!', the business charter on HIV/AIDS put together by the National AIDS Trust, has a list of signatories who do not screen prospective employees for the HIV virus. These include: Marks and Spencer plc; Levi Strauss (UK) Ltd; J.Sainsbury plc; General Electric Company plc; Abbott mead Vickers/BBDO Ltd; IBM UK Ltd; London





Weekend Television; National Westminster Bank; The Body Shop.

Not only has Texaco isolated itself from these leading UK companies, they are also the only Texaco division in the United States and Western Europe that enforces pre-employment testing. ACT - UP are demanding that Texaco UK follow the example of other Texaco companies and furthermore to update their policies so that they can sign the National AIDS Trust's 'Companies Act!'.

You can write to : Glenn Tilton, The Chairman, Texaco Ltd, 1 Westferry Circus, Canary Wharf, London E14 4HA, or ring the Texaco Customer

Service number: 0800 333111.

For further information on ACT - UP's campaign, write to BM 2995, London WC1N 3XX.



### South Africa bans safer sex video

In South Africa, after the banning of the country's first ever safer sex video for gay men, civil rights lawyers are planning to take the country's Publications Committee to the Supreme Court. Both the video for gay men and the heterosexual equivalent, *Safer sex - a lover's guide*, were banned under South Africa's severe censorship laws. The board classed the videos as 'pornographic and offensive.'

Bearing in mind that over 185 00 people on South Africa

are living with HIV, and that it is becoming a heterosexual epidemic, it is so sad that small-minded people are denying others access to such important messages.



### Black only HIV and AIDS services

Two drop-in services for Black people living with or affected by HIV and AIDS are still taking place in London.

The Black only space at the Landmark, 107 Tulse Hill, SW2 2QB, runs on Tuesday evenings between 5-9pm. Housing, legal and welfare advice is on offer as well as the more basic facility of a laundry. Massages and other

<b>BLACK HIV/AIDS ORGANISATIONS</b>	<b>Forum)</b> 9 Anstruther Rd, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 3NN.	SW9 83J. Tel: 071-738 5274
<b>BHAF LEICESTER (Black HIV AIDS Forum)</b> 29 New Walk, Leicester LE1 6TE. Tel: Leicester 559995	<b>BHAN (Black HIV/AIDS Network)</b> Support Asian, African and Afro-Caribbean people affected by HIV and AIDS. 111 Devonport Road, London W12 8PB. Tel: 081-742 9223 (helpline) 081-742 2828 (admin)	<b>NAZ</b> A HIV/AIDS project for the Muslim and South Asian Communities. Contact NAZ c/o BM 3167, London WC1N 3XX. Tel: 081-993 9001.
<b>BHAF MANCHESTER (Black HIV/AIDS Forum)</b> c/o AIDS UNIT-Room 6003, Town Hall Extension, Manchester M60 2JB.	<b>SOUTH EAST ASIAN HIV/AIDS GROUP</b> contact BHAN (above) for details.	<b>SHARE (Shakti HIV/AIDS Response)</b> Advice, information and counselling for South Asians with/concerned with HIV/AIDS. BM SHARE, London WC1N 3XX
<b>BCAT LEEDS (Black Communities AIDS Team)</b> 50 Call Lane, Leeds LS2 5DT Tel: (0532) 423100.	<b>BLACKLINERS</b> Helpline for Black people, offering advice and information on HIV/AIDS. Brixton Enterprise Centre, 444 Brixton Road, London	
<b>BHAF WEST MIDLANDS (Black HIV/AIDS</b>		



## Hiv cont'd...

alternative therapies can be arranged.

For more information ring Landmark on 081-678 6686.

The AKAIRAH (African, Karibbean and Asian Issues Relating to AIDS/HIV) project runs on a Thursday afternoon from 12-5pm. It offers counselling, welfare and housing advice and general information. It meets at the Riverhouse, Hammersmith.

For more information call AKAIRAH on 081-741 4772 (Thursday 12-5pm) or Blackliners on 071-738 5274 (Monday to Friday 11am-4pm).

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## BHAN DANCE

30 April saw the first 'BHAN Dance' at the Highbury Roundhouse in Islington. The crowd listened to the latest tunes and enjoyed a selection of Asian and Caribbean foods. Various celebrities, including Mica Paris, donated items to the raffle which was hugely successful.

Entertainment was provided by the wonderful strains of songstress Stephanie Jones and Vernal Scott, formerly of Brent HIV Centre, kicked off the proceedings.

At the time of writing the figure raised was unknown.

Ayo Oyebade

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## Mosaic Conference

*On 27 March 1993 the first ever conference for lesbians and gay men of mixed racial heritage was held in London.*

Approximately 40 lesbian and gay men attended the conference at Body Positive in Earls Court where we held discussions and workshops during the day. It was encouraging to see people from Manchester and Bristol as well as people from London turning up.

Matthew and Namita ran a media workshop where they showed a video they had produced specially for the day. It featured a compilation of clips of mixed race people in films (not exactly positive images!) This was followed by a discussion on the representation of people of mixed racial heritage in the media.

In the 'biological racism' workshop Werner looked at the sort of pseudo-scientific ideas put out by anthropologists on 'ethnicity'. The workshop pinpointed the contradiction in the fact that there is no scientific basis for the ideas of 'races' but that racism based on this idea is a very real problem in our society.

A lot of research referred to in this workshop was done by political activists campaigning against segregation in the USA in the sixties. Their aim

to disprove the racist theories of anthropologists. The group from this workshop hoped to go on and produce a booklist on the subject.

Our third workshop was a writing workshop run by Kamila; here people wrote and talked about when they were first 'made to feel different'. This then opened up into a wider discussion. We hope that some of the written work produced at this workshop will be published in our conference report. In the afternoon Setereh ran a workshop using art and images to express ideas.

People in this workshop looked at what had influenced them or formed their ideas, and their feelings about these. Themes that emerged from people's paintings and drawings were; religion, spirituality and duality. The discussions that followed led one participant to comment that 'dualism of mixed racial heritage is a metaphor for becoming whole'. I ran a workshop on the role of mixed race communities in the wider black history looking at historical examples from South Africa, India and the USA as well as from Britain. This sparked off a wider discussion on notions of black unity and then inevitably about the terms we use to describe ourselves: black, people of colour, mixed race, mixed racial heritage and the ideas behind



them. We also talked about the role of MOSAIC - the group of mixed race lesbian and gay men who had organised the Conference. People were frustrated with meeting a very insular way and wanted to put their ideas across into campaigns, newspapers, television and to the academic world, as well as to each other in day conferences such as this. As we all met at the end of the day every one was buzzing with all the discussions we'd been having during the day. People were full of good ideas for next year's Conference and about how to make it bigger and better. Personally I was proud to have been involved in organising the day and hope it is the first of many!

We rounded off a very successful day with a social at the WKD cafe/bar in Camden.

CLARE RAMSARAN

## **Celebration of Fierceness...A Thousand Sorries!!**

To all of you who came down to the centre on Saturday 24 April, or those who were simply in anticipation of a celebration of fierce music and dance - on behalf of all at BLGC - we're really sorry.

The last-minute hitch which deprived us all of an eagerly-awaited night of good times was to do with entertainment licenses.

Having charitable status, which is vital for BLGC to continue, we simply couldn't take the risk to go ahead possibly illegally.

Remember however, we have got a number of other events lined up which we guarantee you cannot and will not be cancelled. Please see the diary section for full details.

## **EDITORIAL POLICY**

The BLGC Newsletter is published bi-monthly and aims to provide information on international news, as well as events and campaigns nationally, of interest to Black lesbians and gay men. News items, articles, letters (all written in simple language) or photographs and cartoons are always welcome.

In line with BLGC policy, we will not publish material that is racist, sexist, ableist or assumes readers are without childcare responsibilities, or of a certain social class, cultural/religious/British-born background. Individual articles do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the BLGC. Volunteers for the production of the newsletter are always welcome.

Tel: 081-885 3543.

### **GROUP FOR ARAB LESBIANS**

If you are an Arab lesbian (through one or both parents) interested in meeting others and joining a social/support network, please contact Aida c/o BM Box 1490, London WC1N 3XX.

### **VACANCIES IN A HOUSE FOR LESBIANS IN WANDSWORTH**

The vacancies are in a house which is part of Nacro Housing in London, a low support housing and resettlement scheme. The house consists of two self-contained fully furnished flats, one two-bedroomed and one three-bedroomed. Each resident has their own room, and shares kitchen and bathroom with either one or two other people.

The rent is £52.28 per week; for those on Income Support or Unemployment Benefit, £48.08 of this is covered

by Housing Benefit.

There is a lesbian Project worker available to offer advice and support, and to work with residents to help them move on to permanent accommodation.

The vacancies are open to all lesbians aged 18-60, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; applications from Black lesbians, lesbians with a local connection to the Wandsworth/Battersea area, and from ex-offenders would be particularly welcome. For further information or an application form, contact: Aida Nagasha, Nacro Housing in London, 266 Laverder Hill, London SW11 1LJ, or telephone 071 924-1899.



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## centre update

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The last couple of months have seen increased activities around fundraising, which remains a most crucial issue for the Centre. Naturally this is not an easy task to maintain simultaneously with the other essential work we do. However, we are looking closely at the services we currently provide and (in developing future projects) to synchronise our efforts so that what we do is either income-generating in itself or provides a platform to approach potential funders.

Our aim is still to raise money to convert the back of the arch so that it becomes a viable social space for black lesbian and gay men to meet - with a cafe and bar which will enable us to move toward self-sufficiency.

We cannot stress enough the importance of help and support from our community, in terms of general volunteering albeit for specific tasks, attendance at the fundraising events we are organising, but also the generation of fundraising ideas for our centre. So if anyone can make time to help in any way, please come forward. You may contact either Clarence or Sakthi on 071-732 3885 as soon as possible.

The drop-ins have continued to provide a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere to meet, chat, watch funny videos, play board games and generally have a good time. If you haven't been down to the centre, this is a great opportunity to see both what we have here and what we need!

Fewer people have attended the employment advice sessions still, so look out in the 'dates for your diary' section for the relevant times.

Equally, we are still getting numerous housing opportunities for black lesbians and gay men but the number of requests from our community for housing is surprisingly low. If you're looking, ring up.

A number of fundraising events have been planned especially to coincide with Pride. More details are in the diary section. Briefly, we will have a pre-Pride party on Thursday 17th at the Brixtonian Back Yard (4 Neals Yard, Covent Garden WC2), a post-pride picnic on Sunday 20th in Hyde park and an arts and crafts exhibition on Saturday 26th at the Centre. There are loads of flyers around town; the events are being publicised

in the gay press, so tell all your mates and come along and join us.

Our first event kicked off on the May bank holiday at the Brixtonian in Covent Garden which is a really nice venue. We provided fab food (lovingly prepared by Savi, Clarence and Sakthi), two black women singers regaled us with Cole Porter numbers, accompanied by a very nimble pianist; Avril Rogers-Wright recited her own quite powerful poetry which was received very well. The rest of the time we were entertained by the sounds of Neville who is the promoter of 'Pressure Zone' at the Vox. All in all, everyone who came enjoyed themselves and those who didn't, missed out!! On a serious note, these events are planned in response to the requests from our community and in order to make money for the centre, so haul ass and get down to the next ones!

Amidst this flurry of activity, many calls have been answered, publicity produced, information sent out, the building and its contents maintained. Savi has been kept extremely busy in talks and training in a huge variety of settings and has been met with equally varied responses! Nonetheless, this maintains the profile of BLGC, challenges the relevant issues we face and makes BLGC some money to boot!

Some of us have stepped up our profile in the club scene - in our own time of course, generating interest and support for BLGC and our events.

Finally a word of thanks to all of our volunteers who helped in so many ways, in particular Ainsley who is coordinating our events with considerable dedication not to mention flair!

*A Black Lesbian and Gay Centre needs active input from the Black Lesbian and Gay Community. Get involved.*

*Fill in the form opposite and return it to:  
Black Lesbian and Gay Centre  
BM Box 4390  
London WC1N 3XX*



# Volunteer Details

Date .....

Name .....

Address .....

Tel:.....

Do you mind us contacting you by post? Yes / No.

Do you mind us contacting you by phone? Yes / No.

Please tick alongside the areas in which you can volunteer.

Counselling\*

Helpline

Advice/Information work

Library

Archives

Publicity

Newsletter

Creche work\*

Driving\*

Fundraising/events\*

Talks/training\*

Performing

Cooking

Centre maintenance

Staffing the centre

Interpreting/translating (please specify language(s)).....

Other (please specify)

\*We may have to make checks for these areas of work. (This will be done with your knowledge).

Please tell us about yourself and why you want to volunteer for BLGC, what are your skills and interests and in what work are you interested. (This is not obligatory but it will help the volunteer coordinators when allocating task to volunteers).

Names of references (if applicable). We will not contact them without your permission.

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Thanks again for your interest in BLGC.



# So Who's Who?

## THE BOLD, BEAUTIFUL AND THE DAMNED by Shishir Joshi, Indian Express

### NAGPUR

The sleepy town of Chandrapur, 160 km from Nagpur, woke up to a disquieting dawn on March 21. Two young girlfriends, the elder one barely out of her teens, appeared before their respective parents and expressed the determination to enter into wedlock.

The matter was brushed off as a bad joke by the parents and family friends. But they had failed to grasp the fact that the girls were dead serious. For on April 13, Vinodha Adkewar (18) and her 21-year-old 'husband-to-be', Rekha Chaudhary, presented themselves before the Registrar of Marriages, undaunted in their resolve to live together as a married couple.

It took all the efforts of Police Superintendent Hemant Karkare and Registrar Arjun Khadse to dissuade the couple. They found the younger partner more amenable to their arguments, but their success earned them the wrath of the other.

The girls, having been denied their bold dream, are now back in their respective villages, Patri and Dadgaon, about 60 km from Chandrapur. Rebuked by parents and ridiculed by society, the couple, surely their first such instance in the region, have been left to sulk in silence.

They met each other during a family gathering almost four years ago and a chord was struck almost instantly. Vinoda was barely 14 then and Rekha 17. Soon they discovered they were unlike their sahelis, as neither was interested in the opposite sex.

The distance between their respective homes notwithstanding, they kept in close touch with each other, sometimes staying overnight in each others' house.

The bond only strengthened with time and they cohabited with each other more frequently. 'I'd feel uneasy if I didn't see Vinoda for more than three days', Rekha is reported to have said. Food and other daily chores sank in priority. Meeting each day became their prime objective.

What was taking shape was beyond the consciousness of their families and society.

It was presumed that they were very close friends, and when they embarked upon a pilgrimage last year, the closeness acquired a sort of heightened 'legitimacy'.

The bombshell came on March 21 when the younger Vinoda announced with much aplomb that she planned to wed her close friend. Almost simultaneously, Rekha made her intentions clear to her father, a farmer by profession.

The reaction was predictable. The very thought of such an alliance seemed bizarre to them. The parents tried their level best to talk the girls out of their decision, but in vain. Knowing full well that they would be ostracised, they fled to Chandrapur, their resolve to enter into wedlock only strengthened. 'We decided to rent a room and stay there after marriage', confided Vinoda, who defined herself as the 'wife' in the relationship.

But the Registrar of Marriages was as shocked as the parents when he read their application. 'I was perplexed and unable to decide what to do next', said Mr. Khadse. In order to buy time, he asked the girls to visit him 10 days later.

Their issue whipped up quite a storm in Chandrapur. Judicial officers and police personnel went into urgent deliberations. It was SP Hemant Karkare who had the last say. He asked the girls to be present in the Registrar's office on April 13.

Hundreds turned out at the court premises that day, the news of the judgement having travelled far. Vinoda went in with her parents and younger sister. Rekha waited outside: she had with her a red wedding sari meant for Vinoda... such was her confidence.

It took three hours for Mr Karkare to talk Vinoda out of it, much to the relief of the parents of both the girls, district officials and the large gathering that waited eagerly for the judgement.

But 'husband' Rekha was enraged, not at the law, but the manner in which she had been ditched by her beloved. She flung the red sari away. Tears rolled down her eyes as she walked away, making a feeble attempt to smile.

April 18, 1993  
To  
The Editor,  
Indian Express

We were very disquieted by the sensationalist and tone of the article by Shishir Joshi (18th April 1993) titled *The Bold, Beautiful, and the Damned* regarding the coercive prevention of the marriage between two women in Chandrapur. Obviously Mr Joshi sees the love between the two women and their valiant articulation of their commitment as a disquieting phenomenon something which disrupted the relative calm of 'normalcy' in the 'sleepy town'.

By rejoicing in the dissolution of their union, he allies himself with marriages and the respective families to destroy the relationship. He fails to either recognize the women's courage or the interference by various levels of society into a decision that is extremely personal. He reflects the views of a bigoted society which will go to any lengths to prevent a woman walking out of a violent, heterosexual marriage but will go to any lengths to destroy a loving and healthy lesbian relationship. This is just what Mr Joshi does when he damns the women and takes vicarious pleasure both in the dramatic portrayal of their relationships and the denial of their dream.

SAKHI - Lesbian  
Resource Centre  
P.O Box 7032  
Srinivaspuri  
N. Delhi-110065





**On Friday 4 June, a Black gay man and his partner were attacked in Brixton. What follows is a personal account of what took place.**

At 3pm, my partner and I walked down Railton Road. We were heading for a pizza house in Brixton. To get to the restaurant we had to pass the Frontline off-licence, near the bottom of Railton Road. Five or six African Caribbean men were outside the off-licence standing by a lamp post or sitting on crates. As we were passing we faced the usual looks and grunts of disapproval. After we had passed we were verbally assaulted. We were faced with taunts and jeers of ``batty boy'' etc. I turned and asked who they were calling ``batty boy''. The majority of the crowd laughed, replying that it was I that they were referring to, as if it should have been obvious. The next thing I knew, beer was being thrown in my face, bottles were being hurled at me by one of the seated members of the group. I ducked, shouting at them to leave me alone and walked away.

Further down Railton Road, perhaps at the junction with Saltoun Road, my partner and I realised we were being pursued. The man who had initially thrown beer in my face pushed me to the ground. I immediately stood back up to be greeted by him spitting in my face. I spat back. At this point some of the group were calling their friend, our assailant, to come back. He ignored them, trying to drag me off down a side street. He was suggesting aloud that he had spotted the police. I pulled myself away from him. My partner shouted for my assailant to leave me alone. At that point the attack escalated with several others joining in, kicking both my partner and me to the ground, and taunting us as ``batty men''.

Seconds later the ferocity of the attack diminished. My partner and I ran down Railton Road. We reached the crossroads with Coldharbour Lane, which was swarming with shoppers and passers-by and we slowed down. Our sense of relief was to be short-lived. My partner looked back, momentarily, then shouted: ``Watch out!''

The assailant, who had launched bottles at me, had pursued us down Railton Road. I turned to see a green bottle heading towards my face. My partner and I wrestled with the guy. He was joined by other men who seemed to have joined him along the way or to have come out of the Atlantic pub or to have been part of his original crew.

In the centre of Railton Road, on a crowded shopping Friday, in sunny June, my partner and I were kicked and kicked as if we were dogs. Two African Caribbean women came out of the Atlantic pub calling for the men to stop. They were the only ones. From the ground, while the assault was taking place I saw a crowd of faces. Some were laughing, some were moving towards us to join in the assault, others were just standing still. No-one came to help us. No one called for the beating to stop.

When my partner and I managed to drag ourselves to the other side of the road our assailants, mercifully, decided not to pursue us. Bloodied, and still hungry, we continued our journey to the pizza house. Not one person, not one happy shopper, asked if we needed help.

I sustained cuts and bruises to my left shoulder, my right elbow and my right thigh. My partner got cuts to the left side of his face, to the right and left-hand sides of his head and to his left elbow. He had multiple abrasions to his upper arms. On his back he sustained a laceration and several abrasions, one in the pattern of a boot print. He now carries six stitches. We were both treated at the accident and emergency ward of King's College hospital, to whom, for showing us the gracious side of human nature, we are both eternally grateful.

*BLGC sends our best wishes for this man and his partner. We hope that this vicious attack has not dampened their spirits too much. Our strength lies in supporting one another. Stay strong, brothers.*



# Poetry

## COMMUNITY

### WORKER

Wake too early, eyelids  
heavy

Thoughts scamper through  
my brain

Swallow coffee, splash some  
water

Catch bus then tube then  
train

I play back the message-  
tape, rummage the mail-stack  
An assortment of circulars,  
bills

And letters requesting  
support or assistance  
Tackling problems. The  
entrance-bell trills

I sign for delivery, setting  
the post-log  
To a side - yet more paper's  
arrived

In boxes this time. I attend  
to what's urgent  
Gulp more coffee until I've  
revived

Items piled up in my in-tray  
Loads too much work to do  
Colleague enters, back from  
meeting

He's looking haggard too

The back is uncarpeted,  
ramps still need fixing  
And the copier's painted  
faint streaks

On what it's disgorged:  
could we pay for another?  
What to do if we spring any  
leaks?

Like buds in spring sun-  
shine, our workload is growing  
As our funding, like frost,  
melts away

I'm burning up energy  
raising our profile  
And a few thousand pounds  
on the way

Drop-in time, today the  
turn-out's  
Not high; let tea-bags steep  
Set out biscuits, chat and  
listen

Like folk but need some  
sleep

The centre seems larger  
with no-one remaining  
Except me, switching off  
every light  
And heater, and checking  
I've packed what I'll need till  
Next I'm in. I can leave for  
the night

I try to improve others'  
working conditions  
But I'm beavering too many  
hours

I ought to be off on a lan-  
guid vacation  
Sleeping, reading and  
sneezing at flowers

Rush hour's over, train's not  
crowded  
Nor tube, then longish  
waitBus arrives as light is dim-  
ming  
Home soon. It's getting late

Savi Hensman

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## WORDS FROM THE WOMEN'S CAFE: LESBIAN POETRY FROM 'WORD UP'

ed Bernadette Halpin and  
Dorothea Smartt, Centerprise  
1993, £4.50

Every month, Word Up is  
held at Centerprise, a bookshop,  
publishing project and cafe in  
Hackney, East London. There

## Reviews

writers, musicians, dancers and  
comedians perform to an audi-  
ence of women; Black women's  
evenings are held quarterly.  
This anthology contains some of  
the lesbian poetry read at Word  
Up since it began in early 1991,  
including poems by Maya Cho-  
wdhry, Valerie Mason-John,  
Avril Rogers-Wright and  
Dorothea Smartt.

Some poems, such as Lim

Aii Ling's *For Ma-Je*, touch on  
women's strength and hersto-  
ries, all too often ignored or  
suppressed. Sometimes these  
come across as rather flat,  
drawing little on rhythm and the  
sound of words, or relying too  
much on the rightness of the  
sentiments rather than making  
the subjects vivid. In contrast,  
*The Land Where the Elephants  
Live* by Michelle Asha Warsama



- one of the poems which explore and celebrate African heritage - brings its theme dramatically to life.

Not surprisingly for a collection of lesbian poetry, many of the poems are about desire and love. Those which focus on the joys, sorrows and quirks of human relationships tend to be more interesting than those which describe sex, which all too often slip into clichés: since time immemorial poets have been writing about sexual acts, and it is not easy to find original ways of approaching this.

This does not apply to the magnificent *Sex is...* by Patience Agbabi. What works in performance can sometimes also come across powerfully on the page. This anthology often makes lively, sometimes thought-provoking, occasionally moving reading.

Savi Hensman



### LOVE BY PROXY

Ruth Harris, *Word for Bread* 1993, £6.50

Sexuality, race, disability, friendship, desire and love - these, and more, are touched on in this cassette of 28 poems. Scenes are evoked with clarity, often humorously, from biting into an apple to encountering a monument to a long-dead dignitary's wife. Occasionally rhymes are forced, references to non-English cultures superficial and points laboured. Overall, though, the poetry here is well-crafted and makes interesting listening.

Savi Hensman

## *No Mean Street*

by P. Boakye.

Paul Boakye can write.

It would be so difficult to deny this. His talent lies in his ability to create realistic dialogue and a seemingly natural (the theatre is never totally natural) interaction between characters. He writes, with knowledge, genuine conversations between men, women and children, and he makes them real. Admittedly some of the realness lies in the thespians' talents to explore and exploit nuances in the text but, nevertheless, if there are flaws in the text, good acting will save no piece.

*No Mean Street* is a piece about today. Everything today. It raises issues around being Black, homophobia, parenthood, ways out of, or ways to survive in, 'the system', HIV, sexism and racism both external and internalised.

It could be argued that too many issues are trying to be addressed and consequentially aren't given the attention they merit. But life, like the stage setting, is 'messy' and that is not meant to be derogatory. The stage was minimal in design and the edges of props were sharp, metal, like the industrial wasteland of our inner cities. The characters ran across the stage and around each other throughout the play, interacting on a day-to-day basis, responding to incidents and crises when and wherever they arose. It is true that our lives do not have incidents happening in isolation of each other. Events do not

happen chronologically after each other. Lives have events falling across each other, incidents clashing into each other, occurrences crawling over each other. This is why *No Mean Street* worked as a realistic reflection of life.

It needs to be made clear that the play, apart from being amusing and educative, was written with the idea of follow up workshops in mind. The piece is a vehicle from which to develop further the many themes that arise from the play. A character is labelled a 'battyboy' and is beaten up by the drug dealing Arlington and Stagger because he is different from them. A possible follow-up workshop on homophobia and stereotyping. A woman prostitutes herself to get the drugs on which she has become dependent. Follow-up: drugs and their relation (if any) to unsafe sex practices. The list could go on and on.

The play is not always easy to watch or to follow and it does demand some concentration. Yes, plays with a definite beginning, middle and end have their place because we do need to have diversion in our lives. Although *No Mean Street* is entertaining it is not traditional theatre. So many questions remain unanswered and this is a good thing. Does Arlington change his ways? Does his partner learn that she too is positive and living with HIV? What is the effect on the child?

Some people have said that many of the characters are stereotypes of Black people. To a degree it could be debated that this is true. Arlington is a ma-



cho, womanising, gun-welding, drug dealer, shirking his paternal responsibilities. Stagger is a comic, never serious, bopping ragga, whose homophobia knows no bounds. Jean is, in effect, a single parent, struggling to raise herself and her son in the best way possible, doing a social work course. Stereotypes are an easy theatrical technique, but it is hard not to make them so comical that the audience does not relate to them. Although no-one would want to identify themselves with these stereotypes many could see others, if not admitting to seeing bits of themselves, in them. How many people have heard, as Arlington said, that "Black people don't get AIDS". Similarly there was the perpetual false equation made with being gay and HIV. Marcus, Jean's son, on learning of his father's disease asks if his dad was gay. Stagger, feeling that HIV renders people impotent, approaches Arlington saying "Me hear seh you have AIDS. You must be a bat-tybwoy." It would have been out of character for Arlington to have delivered a diatribe on homophobia and stereotyping so it went unchallenged and hopefully would be picked up later in the workshops after the play.

The actors were excellent, and with the exception of Arlington, played different characters within the play. It is to their credit as performers that this did not confuse issues and characters. The whole event worked. The venue ( it was shown at the Black only drop-in space at the Landmark on a Tuesday evening), and the

audience itself (vociferous enough for the actors to feel a presence off which they could bounce their efforts, supportive enough to listen during important scenes and those filled with pathos) worked. But the play could just as easily work at the Man in the Moon theatre or as a play on BBC television. It really is that good.

*No Mean Street* is about, and for, our brothers, sisters, lovers and children. It is a play about today and has as much relevance to my life as a Black gay man as did Boakye's piece about two Black gay men learning truly to love and respect each other (*Boy With Beer*) or his piece about the double standards of what is perceived as beautiful in the Black community (*Hair*). There are no out gay characters in *No Mean Street*. The characters speak to Black people, all Black people, about the hypocrisies, the sadness and the attitudes of our community, in a language we can all hear. It is just so important that we listen.

## Calls for Submissions

Kuumba, the twice-a-year journal of poetry dedicated to the celebration of the lives and culture of lesbians and gay men of African descent, wants to see your work. It seeks submissions of poetry on all subjects reflecting experiences within our community. Typical areas of interest are: coming out, involvement with family, interactions with surrounding communities, substance abuse, the arts, political activism, oral histories, AIDS and intimate relationships.

All poetry should be typed with line and stanza breaks clearly delineated. Please include the usual self-addressed, stamped envelope with your manuscripts. Send work to: Editors, Kuumba, Box 83912, Los Angeles, CA 90083-0912. For more information call 310-410-0808. Women are especially encouraged to submit work.

Kuumba also includes drawings (not photographs). Artists are encouraged to submit samples of their work.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

London Friend, which provides a meeting-space for several Black lesbian and gay groups, also runs its own support and counselling services for lesbians and gays, staffed by volunteers. I have been asked to work with those involved in LF to make it more attractive and relevant to Black, Irish and Jewish people. I would very much appreciate finding out

views and experiences. If you had a problem, would you think of ringing LF's helpline? Would you recommend an LF-organised group to someone coming out? If not, why not? You can contact me at BLGC, BM Box 1490, London WC1N 3XX or on 071-732 3885 in confidence.

Savi Hensman



## A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF A BLGC WORKER

### *Sunday*

I clamber on a bus heading for central London. I have arranged to meet a woman who is coming out and go along with her to one of the Black lesbian and gay groups which continue to provide a vital service to those new to the scene, as well as giving people who are more confident about themselves a chance to get together regularly. I was extremely nervous the first few times I ventured out to places where I would meet other lesbians and gays: it is perhaps tempting to blank out those memories of fearfulness and uncertainty. Much of the work of the staff (all part-timers) and volunteers at the Centre involves talking, on the phone or face to face, with people who are coming out, isolated or facing specific problems - low-profile but highly important work. She arrives promptly, and we make our way to the group.

### *Tuesday*

I am in Peckham Rye today, in the two railway arches joined together which somehow we must find the money to heat, light, make more accessible and adapt as a cafe, bar

and social space. I answer some phone-calls as co-workers and a volunteer plan future cultural events to raise our profile and some funds, as well as giving artistes the chance to display their talents and everyone the chance to have a good time.

### *Wednesday*

Today all the staff are in. We try to meet up every Wednesday to keep one another informed about what we are doing and discuss anything which needs to be sorted out collectively. The Management Com-

mittee are in charge of our budget and overall plan of action, and there are many things which each worker can do on his or her own initiative, but teamwork among the staff is also essential. However we do not want to spend too much time in meetings, so every other week we have a full workers' meeting while in between we simply allocate letters and phone calls which are not obviously directed towards any particular worker and deal with urgent business. One of the others is staffing the drop-in this evening. I take a folder of training

materials, photocopied in sufficient quantities, back to Hackney with me.

### *Thursday*

I arrive in New Cross. The students are black women wanting to work with people in occupations such as youth work, and I have prepared a one-day course on lesbian issues for them. Hopefully this will draw on their own knowledge and experience and commitment to those they wish to serve, and help prepare them to challenge discrimination in some of the situations they may face. Training can be nerve-





wracking, but it can also be exhilarating when genuine communication takes place and barriers are broken down. The session goes well, and the anonymous evaluations I receive at the end are positive. I head back to the Centre to complete an article for a new newsletter to go out to several thousand people. Last week I gave a talk in Nottingham to a national meeting of one of the trade union lesbian and gay groups which has been helped us to raise funds, and this was where I was invited to send an item for publication. Often it is quite difficult to get information into the mass media (though much easier than it used to be, partly because the resistance of many producers and editors to mentioning Black lesbians and gays has been reduced after years of lobbying and partly because a Centre is more newsworthy than a project).

*Friday*

I arrive in Brixton shortly before 8pm. I am to give a brief talk on

BLGC at a dinner in honour of Black Lesbians and Gays Against Media Homophobia, and where in addition the Jamaican Homosexual Association is to be launched. As I wait and other people eat, we chat. Since everyone at the dinner is familiar with Black lesbian and gay issues and some are involved in BLGC, I focus on the current position and the challenges and opportunities ahead of us. Unfortunately I cannot stay for the reading and video which are to follow, though I catch a glimpse of Clarence on screen! I take the tube to central London. In my spare time, like my co-workers I am a volunteer for another lesbian and gay organisation, and tonight I am helping out at a dance. This gives me the chance to hand out BLGC flyers.

Savi Hensman

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### **Keep media-watching**

More and more complaints about lesbian and gay themed programmes are being rejected by the Independent Television Commission (ITC) and the British Standards Council (BSC). Pro-

grammes which have gay contents are still a major target from some members of the public.

People complained after The Big Breakfast showed two gay men kissing and cuddling. The complaints were rejected. The BSC said: "The two men spoke about their long-term partnership in a tender and loving way and {we} do not think that the contents of the item was unacceptable for an item which went out at this time."

The ITC said: "Our policy is never to accept the principle that gays and lesbians shouldn't appear on screen at any time and at any place."

Also, apparently, the BBC does not have time for Pride. Johnathon Rooper, head of secretarial services said: "BBC news has a policy of covering regular marches and demonstrations when they are relevant to an impending piece of legislation." An added complication is that events of this kind frequently take place at weekends when the main news bulletins are considerably shorter; time available is, therefore, even more restricted than usual."

*While it is important for us, the viewers, to complain when the television treats us badly, we must also give praise when a programme is good. That way we can balance out the number of calls from people who will always complain about lesbian and gay issues on television.*

### **BLGC**

#### **Access codes**

A1. B2,5 no's 12, 37, 63, 78, 312, P2, P12. B2,6 no's 36, 36b, 171, P13. C4 steep. D1 entrance and two internal doors 35" D3, 5, toilet 29" D3, 5, back door 29" D2,6. E1. Fnone. G1 42"x 61.5", G2. H1. J2 in front, bare concrete floor in back. K1. L1, 2, 3, 4, 7. M3. N2, 3 BLGC publications, 4 advance notice needed, 5. Q-none, child care costs provided. R-light refreshments. T1, 2. U1, 2



## SAD ACCESS CODE

- A PARKING** 1-Outside entrance 2-Less than 50 yards away 3-More than 50 yards away
- B PUBLIC TRANSPORT** 1-Tube 2-Bus 3-Rail 4-Less than 50 yards 5-More than 50 yards 6-More than 1/4 Mile
- C ENTRANCES** 1-Level 2-Ramp without rail 3-Ramp with rail 4-Steps without handrail 5-Steps with handrail 6-Steep steps 7-Shallow steps 8-Curved steps
- D DOORS** 1-Width 2-Heavy 3-Light 4-Revolving 5-Opens inwards 6-Opens outwards
- E INSIDE BUILDING** 1-Level 2-Steps without handrail 3-Steps with Handrail 4-Steps steep 5-Steps shallow 6-Steps curved
- F LIFT** 1-Dimensions 2-Controls high 3-Controls low 4-Controls flush 5-Controls protruding 6-Handrail 7-Seat in 8-Smooth 9-Jerky 10-Doors automatic 11-Doors manual heavy 12-Doors Manual light 13-Doors concertina 14-Doors straight
- G TOILETS** 1-Dimensions 2-Doors open inwards 3-Doors open outwards 4-Rails 5-Air driers hand operated 6-Air driers foot operated 7-Air driers automatic 8-Taps hand operated 9-Taps foot operated
- H DIMENSIONS Of PREMISES** 1-Large building 2-Small building 3-Corridors
- J FLOOR SURFACES** 1-Smooth 2-Carpet 3-Slippery
- K LIGHTING** 1-Bright 2-Dim 3-Flexible(eg. movable)
- L SEATING** 1-Hard 2-Soft 3-High 4-Low 5-Plentiful 6-Static 7-Movable
- M HEATING** 1-Warm 2-Cool 3-Variable
- N PARTICIPATION** 1-Braille 2-Tape 3-Large print 4-Signers 5-Induction loop. 6-Finger spelling 7-Lip speakers 8-Note takers
- P HELPERS** 1-Transport 2-Meeting & escorting. 3-General help.
- Q CRECHE** 1-Run by men 2-Run by women 3-Run by both sexes 4-Facilities for children with disabilities 5 - Under fives only 6 -Upto 12 years only 7 -Girls only 8 - Mixed
- R FOOD & DRINK** 1-Drinks only 2-Vegan 3-Vegetarian 4-Non-vegetarian 5-Self service 6-Table service 7-Licensed bar 8-Specific alcohol free areas 9-all space alcohol free
- S SMOKING** 1-Not allowed 2-Allowed 3-Specific areas 4-Specific times
- T STRUCTURE OF ACTIVITIES** 1-Formal meetings 2-Informal 3-Continuous 4-Frequent Breaks
- U TELEPHONE** 1-In an accessible area 2-Private phone 3-Call phone



# Regular Groups

## LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

**SHAKTI LONDON** - South Asian Lesbian and Gay Network. The group meets every 2nd Sunday of the month from 3-6pm at LONDON FRIEND, 86 Caledonian Rd, London N1 (wheelchair access, nearest tube Kings Cross). Disco with bhangra music on 2nd Friday of month from 10pm-2am at Recessions, 2 Brunswick Shopping Centre, London WC1 (nearest tube Russell Square). For more information tel: 071-837 2782.

**SHAKTI BRADFORD** - Tel: 0274-723802 /722206.

**SHAKTI BIRMINGHAM** - Tel: 021-622 7351. Ask for a Shakti contact.

**SHAKTI MANCHESTER** - Tel: 061-274 3814.

**MANCHESTER BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP** - Meetings 1st and 3rd Thursday of every month at Manchester Gay Centre. Further info from: PO Box 153. Manchester M60 1LP.

**ORIENTATIONS** - Chinese and South East Asian lesbian and gay group meet at LONDON FRIEND (see Shakti).

**CYPRIOT LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP** meets on the 1st Sunday of the month 2.30pm-5pm at LONDON FRIEND (see Shakti). Ring for more details.

**LEICESTER BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP** - For details write to c/o Michael Wood Centre, 29 New Walk, Leicester LE1 6TE.

**BIRMINGHAM BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP (KOLA)** - Meets 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month. Tel: Friend 021-622 7351.

**BLACK LESBIANS AND GAYS AGAINST MEDIA HOMOPHOBIA (BLAGAMH)** - For more information write to BLAGAMH, FREEPOST, London SE8 5BR. (No stamp needed.)

**MOSAIC** - a group of Mixed Race Lesbians and Gay Men holds discussions every month and runs socials. For further information contact BLGC on 071-732 3885.

**BRISTOL BLACK LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL GROUP (SAFAR)** - Meets the first Tuesday of each month. For more information Tel: (0272) 639 789 (men), 427 731 (women) or Bristol Switchboard 425 927.

## LESBIANS

**CAMDEN BLACK LESBIAN GROUP** runs socials, discussions and workshops for Black lesbians. For details contact CLC/BLG, 54-56 Phoenix Rd, London NW1 1ES (wheelchair access, minicom, creche available; tel: 071-383 5405).

**LAS DIVINAS** - Latinamerican Lesbian Group, for details contact CLC/BLG (see Camden Black Lesbian Group).

**YOUNG BLACK LESBIAN GROUP** at Lewisham Young Women's Project meets the last Wednesday of every month 7-10pm at Lewisham Young Women's Project, 308 Brownhill Rd, Lewisham. For further details ring 081-698 6675.

**NOTTINGHAM BLACK LESBIAN GROUP** - Meets first Friday evening of the month in Black Lesbian Room, Nottingham Women's Centre, 30 Chaucer Street, Nottingham, NG5 1LP. Tel: 0602-411475.

**BLACK LESBIANS IN SOLIDARITY** - Write to PO Box 11, 124 Vassall Road, SW9 6JB.

**ZAMIMASS** (group for working class black lesbians) - For details contact CLC/BLG (see Camden Black Lesbian Group) or BLGC on 071-732 3885.

**BLACK LESBIAN CULTURAL WORKERS COLLECTIVE** - For black lesbians producing cultural materials, from sculpture to hats to music. For details contact Zamimass.

**OLDER BLACK LESBIAN GROUP** (over forty) meets 1st Sunday of every month between 3-6pm at West Hampstead Women's Centre, 55 Hempstal Rd, NW6. Tel: 071-328 7389.

**ZAMI (MANCHESTER BLACK YOUNG LESBIAN GROUP)**. To get Black women together so that they are not alone. Advice, counselling and support. For more information tel: 061 834 7256 or 061 236 6205 Mon-Thurs 6-9pm.

**LEEDS BLACK LESBIAN SUPPORT GROUP**. c/o Harehills Housing Aid, 188 Roundhay Rd, Harehills, Leeds 8.

## GAY MEN

**LET'S RAP** - Black gay men talking to Black gay men. Tel: 071-737 3881 or BLGC office.

**NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE BLACK GAY MEN'S SUPPORT GROUP** - contact 091-233 1333 before 6pm or 091-261 7768 after.

**LONDON BLACK MESMAC GROUP** - For African and African-Caribbean gay or bisexual men under 25. Meets Thursday evenings. Tel: 071-831 2330 for venue.

**LEEDS BLACK GAY MEN'S GROUP** - for African, Asian, Caribbean and other black gay men, meets fortnightly on Thursdays 7.30pm onwards. For further information contact David/Michael on 0532-444209.



Are you a Black lesbian or Gay man who would like to learn and receive full training in Managerial, Supervisory and Financial skills?

Would you like to be part of a team that develops a Centre and services for the Black lesbian and Gay Community?

Would you enjoy making connections with other lesbian and gay organisations both nationally and internationally?

The Black Lesbian and Gay Centre is looking for Management Committee members.

Management Committee meetings take place once a month and there are occasional other meetings.

Please call The Black Lesbian and Gay Centre on: 071-732 3885.

## Black Lesbian and Gay Centre Emergency General Meeting:

### Meeting:

### Election of New MC

### Members,

### Update on Centre

### events.

### Date: Thurs.15th July

### 1993, 7.30pm at

### The Centre,

### Arch 196 Bellenden Rd.

### SE15 .

### Black lesbian and Gay

### men welcome.

#### CLC/BLG (Camden Lesbian Centre/Black Lesbian Group)

54-56 Phoenix Road London NW1 1ES

A single yellow line outside entrance B1, 3, 5 nos 14, 14a, 18, 30, 73 stop on Euston Rd, near Shaw Theatre. C1. D main door 32.75", 3, 5, fire exit door 31.5", other doors 31.3". E ground floor building, 1. F none. G two toilets - door to 1st 30.5", 3 dimensions 5.75'x4.5', turning distance 3', door to 2nd 29.5" 3 dimensions 3x5.5', turning distance 2' H2 front door to meeting room 8', meeting room to office 7', meeting room to large WC 11.5', meeting room to other WC 22', meeting room to creche 18' creche to fire exit 13.5. J1. K1, 3 in meeting room, creche & office. L1, 2, 4, 5, 7. M3. N8 some info on large print & tape, BSL stage 2 communicator, minicom. P3. Q2, age limit 11, 8. Rnon alcoholic drinks available. S3. T1, 2, 4. U1,2, minicom in office.

LondonFriend 86 Caledonian Road, London N1

Tel: General 071 837 2782

Access Codes A1 B1- King's Cross, 5 B2 -nos 17 & 221, 4 B3- Kings Cross, 5 C4/7(1step) D1 -90cm E3/4 - one set of two steps, 3,4 one set of 13 steps, 3,4F none, ramp for ground floor access only G1/4-one toilet 214cmX207cm with two handrails and sliding door, 8 one toilet 87cmx207cm, 2,8 H2, 3-one corridor 312cm J1-kitchen, toilets & entrance vinyl floor,2-remaining rooms & corridor K2L1, 5, 7 M3 N none P3-if prior notification is given

Q-none-contact them as arrangements may be made R1+crisps S2 T2-but structured U2-not for general use



*The following Article is from Ache , a Black lesbian publication in the US. The article has been edited.*

**``DON'T CALL US BRITISH!''**

by Sky Ward

*Getting the truths of our lives out continues to be the first line of defense in our struggle for black liberation. In this interview, three black lesbians from the UK candidly discuss the realities of their lives. They also offer commentary on the misconceptions African American women, and women of African descent in England have about each other. Angela, Betty and Jean are all first - generation born in Britain, whose families originate from Africa and the Caribbean.*

*Recently they were in Oakland, California to attend the 5th Annual Black Gay and Lesbian Conference. In this interview they offer their views on a range of topics, from identity politics, class analysis, cross cultural tensions and political activism, to the effects of the European Community on black people's lives in the UK.*

*How do you identify yourself sociopolitically?*

**Angela:** I identify myself as a black lesbian of working - class origin - now classified as middle - class due to my occupation, I'm a lawyer.

**Betty:** I identify myself socially being middle - class by default - in the sense that I went to college. I'm of working class origin; my family came from Nigeria, and they would be defined as working class. But through education and my work, I would be described as middle - class... I work in social housing.

**Jean:** As you can see, the issue of class is important to us in Britain. That's usually how we define ourselves politically. I'm a black lesbian and I come from working - class origins, and still define myself as working - class despite my educational background.

*Why is that?*

**Jean:** Because I don't see as a black person that I have the privileges that white people who are middle - class have.

*How do you see yourself on an activist continuum?*

**Jean:** I'm not really involved as an activist in any organisation at this moment in time. I have been in the past. I believe as black people we are always politically active whether we are in an organisation or not because of the racism. We are always having to challenge, and if not challenge, be aware that there are situations where we should challenge...

**Betty:** I think that I have to agree with Jean around that - on being active everyday. I don't see myself being visibly involved in any movement per se. My concerns in terms of spare time is certainly around black people and mental health...issues around HIV and AIDS. That's where my visible activism is.

**Angela:** I think as black people and as black lesbians we're obviously faced with daily challenges around racism, and homophobia. But I think in terms of political activism, challenging as individuals, although important, won't have as great an effect as in organising as groups, or as factions. You know in order to have some real influence on the powers that

be, which are out there, which are against us. The more I become able to articulate my concerns. At present I'm involved with the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre Project, since 1989. The project was founded in 1985. It's been funded since 1985. It is staffed by two full - time workers. The main aim of the project has been to locate secure premises, so that we actually have a centre for black lesbians and gay men in London. We've recently located premises which we will be moving into shortly. From since 1985, the project has run help - lines and advice counselling information over the telephones. The bulk of the work is done around reaching isolated black lesbians and gay men who are coming out. *What are the most crucial issues facing activist lesbians of African descent in London? What is on your political agendas?*

**Betty:** There is definitely an issue around communication with other communities. I think communication has been very poor...just our ability to acknowledge who we are in the UK. I feel we need to seek...we need to travel as a way to communicate.

**Jean:** HIV and AIDS. Most important getting the message to black heterosexuals...you know to work as black people heterosexual and gays against AIDS. (**Angela:** I have a problem with that!)...I'm a black person who is a woman and a lesbian, I can't separate. So just as who I am, I think that's what we should be working on and other health issues.

**Betty:**...But we're doing that already. I mean that action and that kind of practice is happening already. I have a problem with us always taking on that role. Wherein we're doing that kind of healing, that kind of work. Because for one reason or

.....

*...just looking in the faces of women who you know have a completely different history from you...*

.....

another, being black and gay seems to put you in touch visually...in touch with issues straight black society is not willing to deal with. But you know, at the same time we are being rejected on another level, yet we're doing that fundamental work. Because within that, we're still fighting for our right to be. Homophobia is still extremely present.

**Angela:** One of my political agenda items is increasing the visibility, acceptance and placement of gays and lesbians within the black community. I feel that is very high on the agenda. As part of that, continuing the effect of challenging homophobia both within the black community and in white society.

I think as some of us grow older, grow confident, we feel ``why should I have to put up with leading double lives;'' and just worrying what society thinks. I certainly feel that that's growing more and more within me - like I've had enough of this. So I certainly see that as being on the agenda; naturally



.....

**...As black people we are always politically active whether we are in an organisation or not because of racism...**

.....

HIV and AIDS and general health issues in the black community. And economics, because we're in the UK and we're moving within this 1992 European Economic Community.

*What are your perceptions of African American lesbians, politically and culturally, etc.?*

**Angela:** It's been an issue in the last few years in London. A number of African American lesbians have come over to London and have settled. It's been an issue because very real cultural differences have become really apparent, in terms of how we interact - issues and conflicts have arisen. One thing that springs into my mind is our political differences. That is a generalisation, but what seems to be a fundamental difference is how we view our movements in terms of race politics. I'm very aware that here your emphasis seems to be on African Americans...Black means of African descent and purely of African descent. Whereas the movement in London in the black lesbian and gay community has been much more towards people of colour. I know that you use that term here, and I'm aware that there are organisations based on that perspective. But I think I can say that in London that's more the general perspective, as opposed to one aspect of a broader movement.

We organise in such a way that we incorporate ourselves as people of colour. Rather than say, "people of colour" we say black, meaning people who descend from Africa, Asia, Middle East and basically everybody who is non-European.

*How do you perceive our differences?*

**Jean:** One of the things I found different and also very difficult to deal with, was how black lesbians whom I've met in England, who came from the states, have termed themselves Americans. "I'm American." "I'm from America." I have a real difficulty with that because America is presented to us as nearly strictly white capitalists. I think speaking for all of us here, none of us would say we're British even though we live in Britain and were born in Britain. I'm not British - that's where my family was displaced. I'm African. That's one of the things that really used to play on my mind. And I thought with that difference between us, I didn't think there was any way to make proper links - links that would make any difference. But I understand now a lot more as to why black lesbians from America call themselves American.

*Why do you suppose some African American lesbians identify as "American"?*

**Jean:** In my family I'm first-generation born in the UK. We all here are first generation born in the UK.

So my links with Africa and the Caribbean are obviously so much closer. Black people in the states, when they look back, their links are very much based in America. So I really didn't understand...I know it, but I didn't understand what it meant or the consequences.

*Just for the record, I'd like to state that there are many of us (African American women) whose families are descended from slaves; are African-identified, and do not necessarily identify with the dominant white-supremacist capitalist culture in the states. We view ourselves as part of being a nation-within-a-nation, characterised by a distinct culture and language.*

**Jean:** I know that now. It was never shown to us that there was a culture within a culture in America. It was never "black american" culture separate from "white american" culture. When I heard black Americans say "I'm American", the only concept I had was white america.

*Did your perceptions change upon visiting the states, or upon meeting African-identified black American women in the UK?*

**Angela:** For myself it was more upon coming here. I attended the National Black Lesbian and Gay Conference last year in Los Angeles. That was a very important experience for me. It really brought home lots of insights and information...and coming back again this year.

*What misconceptions do you think African American women have of black women in the UK? And vice versa.*

**Betty:** In England the image of black people in America is one of being very flashy, wealthy. I don't know where this image of wealth is from. Also, that we have little in common, that an African American is somehow intrinsically connected with white americans. Yeah getting back to what Jean was saying, that we don't realise that we're the same people. That we have had some of the same experiences...I know I'm being romantic, but just looking in the face of women, who you know have had a completely different history from yourself, but in the present, and quite clearly, we are the same. We only need look in each other's face and we can see that. (**Jean:** Very poetic!) But I don't think we realise that. That's why I emphasise the importance of travelling and meeting each other so that we can see each other. And then work very hard so that process (misconceptions) doesn't happen. I think there are a lot of misconceptions, and as a result there is a lot of unnecessary frictions.

**Angela:** A number of times I've been surprised to meet Black Americans, who are really surprised to hear that there are black people in the UK. I think there is to an extent probably a misconception that there aren't many black people, and therefore there can't be many black lesbians in the UK. Or a misconception, that because in a sense our history in the UK is obviously so much younger, than the history of black Americans, we are somehow backwards... Because there are big historical figures in America, and we really haven't got equivalents in London. I certainly have felt this feeling from black American women, that we are lesser beings, we're behind, and there is much for us to learn from Americans. I'm sure that there is, but I feel very strongly that there is a two-way process to learning.

**Jean:** I've always thought it very strange, that people think that there are not many of us in England. I assure you that there are.

*Sistahs, thank you very much.*



# BLGC Pride Events

**Proud Picnic. Relax Recover Rejoice**

**Sunday June 20th 3pm. Meet Hyde Park Tube Exit 3. Food and soft drinks provided.  
(Bring your own booze). £3.00, 50p off for members.**

**Black lesbians, gays and their friends.**

**Tickets available in advance at Pride.**

**Arts and Crafts Exhibition**

**Saturday 26th June 2 - 8pm. Food and soft drinks on sale. Performances, stalls.**

**At the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre**

**Arch 196 Bellenden Road Peckham SE15. Peckham Rye BR.**

**Entrance free.**

**Watch Out For The BLGC Banner And Stall At Pride!**

EVENTS EVENTS EVENTS EVENTS EVENTS EVENTS EVENTS  
PRIDE

'A Deeper Love' - The Post Pride Women's Party, Saturday 19th June, 10pm - 6am. DJs Slamma, Princess Julia, Queen Maxine & Sarah HB (Kiss FM). Beers from £1.50, Vegetarian food available. Venue: 134-146 Curtain Rd. EC2. Tickets £10/£6 concs./£15 VIP, available in advance from The Passion Pit Tent at Lesbian & Gay Pride, or by credit card on 071-916 0162.

"Another Country" organised by The Pressure Zone and Queer Nation on Saturday 19th June, 8pm-6am at The Vox, Brighton Terrace, SW9. Tickets: £7 inc. £1 Donation to charity. DJs Merran, Clayton G, Chris McKoy, Angie D, amongst others. 3 Dance Areas.

A Black Lesbian Pride Celebration on Sunday 27th June, 4 - 8pm, at Camden Black Sisters, 2C Falkland Road, Kentish Town, London NW5, Tel: 071 284-3336. An Afternoon of poetry reading, singing and discussion. Performers: Avril Rodgers Wright & Adeola. Creche, food, stalls available. Free transport available for women with disabilities (Please ring in advance to book transportation). Entrance: £1.00. For Lesbians of African/Caribbean Descent.

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**Deaf and Hearing Lesbian Integrated Group** - Are you interested in meeting other deaf, partially deaf, deafened, hard of hearing, and hearing lesbians for discussion and socialising?

The Camden Lesbian Centre/Black Lesbian Group have a new group every 4th Friday of the month at 7 pm at CLC, 54-56 Phoenix Road, London NW1, telephone: 071 384 4598 Voice & Minicom. All discussions will have an Invited Group/Organisation or Speaker and an Interpreter present.

**The Wild Court Fitness Suite** at the Women's Centre, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2, telephone: 071 831 6946. A new leisure facility exclusively for women, offering fully supervised gymnasium, fitness assessment, luxurious relaxation areas with Roman Spa and Sauna, one-to-one training and full access for people with disabilities. Ring for opening times.

**Women's Health Information Day**, Thursday 24th June 1993, The Thomas Calton Centre, Alpha Street, Peckham, SE15, 11am to 4pm, To provide information about alternative health therapies to women. For more information contact: Julie Lomax, Southwark Inform, 177 Abbey Street, London SE1 2AN, telephone 071 252 3010.

**Centerprise Bookshop** presents an evening of sharp and fiery story-telling with three new Serpent's Tail Authors: Albyn Leah Hall - Deliria, Eroica Mildmay - Lucker and Tiffany Peel out, Jonathon Neale - The Laughter of Heroes. Monday 5th July 1993 at 7.30pm, Free Admission, Centerprise, 136 Kingsland High St E8, 071 254 9632.

**London Gay Mens Choir** are seeking more members. At the moment they are launching a requiem ('`Undying Heart - A Requiem for Aids') to be performed in aid of The Lesbian and Gay Bereavement Project. Previous experience of singing not essential, rehearsals are at 7pm on Mondays evenings at The Holborn Centre for Performing Arts, Three Cups Yard (behind Three Cups Pub), Sandland Street, Holborn, WC1R 4PZ, telephone 071 405 5334.