

The Jamaica OutPost

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Global Headlines

- Canadian justice minister says no referendum on gay marriage bill.
- German scientists have discovered a new inhibitor that blocks the natural production of a human enzyme, essential for the survival of the HIV virus in the human body.
- Researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago in the U.S. have confirmed that similarity between genes of gay brothers appear to influence that sexual orientation.
- U.S. President George W. Bush reiterates his support for the amendment to the U.S. constitution that would ban same-sex marriages.

The Jamaica OutPost

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GLBT TSUNAMI RELIEF EFFORT WITH A JAMAICAN CONNECTION

By Anthony Hron, The Jamaica OutPost Contributor

The recent devastation in the wake of the December 26th tsunami in the Indian Ocean has motivated many individuals and organisations to lend assistance in the stricken area. Many of our readers may remember Emily Paul who spent several years in Jamaica serving as the first Programme Coordinator for the Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-Sexuals and Gays (J-FLAG) and for laying the foundation of today's Women for Women group.

For the past 3 years, she has been living with her partner in Colombo, Sri Lanka where she has also been active with the GLBT community through volunteer work with support and advocacy organisation Women's Support Group. Most recently, she helped her part-



Emily Paul (right) and partner Rosanna Flamer Caldera (Photo courtesy of E. Paul)

ner, Rosanna Flamer Caldera, former coordinator of the Women's Support Group and current Co-Secretary General of the International Lesbian and Gay Association, launch Equal Ground, a new GLBT organization, and joined the Foundation for Co-Existence (FCE), a chari-

table organisation working to promote peaceful dialogue and interaction between the various factions involved in the country's recently ended twenty-year civil war. Neither Emily nor Rosanna were prepared for what was to happen.

(See Connection on page 2)

THE MISUNDERSTANDING OF JAMAICA'S CULTURE

By Jason Simmonds, The Jamaica OutPost Contributor

It seems like the word culture has been popping up more and more in my face of late. In more than one of my courses at the university, in books I have been reading, the local newspapers and the list could go on and on. I decided to stop for a moment to reflect on this thing called 'culture'.

The Oxford Senior Dictionary (God forbid I use the foreign dictionary here!) explains the word 'culture' as the customs and civili-

zation of a particular people or group, giving the West Indian culture as an example. Robert Lado, in his 1957 book entitled 'Linguistics Across Cultures', describes culture as the ways of a people. Two absolutely distinct sources and yet both explanations of what 'culture' is seem to be the same to me. Therefore, the claim that homophobia is a part of Jamaica's culture would technically be correct, right? In

fact, if we really examine the general view of the Jamaican public, it seems clear that hostility toward homosexuals is really of the people. If it is not entrenched in the Jamaican Constitution that we should hate, beat and kill homosexuals, then how could we explain the passage of this seemingly "cultural" practice from generation to generation?

(See Misunderstanding on page 3)

(Connection...Continued from page 1)

Boxing Day in Colombo began as any other – warm, sunny and lazy. Soon, however, reports of an unusually large “tidal wave” began to filter in. Glued to the news reports, the severity of the situation became clearer. But the overwhelming extent of the devastation did not paralyze the people of Sri Lanka. According to Emily, the people of Sri Lanka responded to the catastrophe with immediacy second to none. Through cooperative strategies, local organizations and citizen volunteers took charge of all relief efforts during the first week since the government took some time to organize more formal efforts.

Within hours of the disaster, friends of their organisations headed to the east and south of the island to deliver food and pharmaceutical supplies to the affected communities and set up medical stations to receive and care for the injured. Efforts to coordinate their operation was made easier thanks to calls and SMS messages they received on their cellular phones to identify and locate drop-off points for the relief supplies. The tremendous contributions of the Sri Lankan people in the face of death and destruction were amazing for both Emily and Rosanna. They soon found themselves working 12 and 13 hours per day, making calls for donations, updating people on their progress, writing emails, updating websites, attending meetings on how to use funds in the relief and rehabilitation efforts, organizing and supervising volunteers, coordinating work efforts and filling food sacks during the evenings for delivery to the devastated areas.

“The magnitude of the catastrophe that affected Sri Lanka on Boxing Day is something that is hardly describable,” said Rosanna in a release to The Jamaica OutPost. She further informed us that members of Equal Ground have contributed not only their time but have also bought relief supplies and donated them to larger organisations that send trucks to the northern, eastern and southern regions of the island. Many of the gay spaces in the south and in Negombo, a city north of Colombo, were severely damaged or completely destroyed by the tsunami. Rosanna affirms that it will take Sri Lanka many years to rebuild its economy and for the people of Sri Lanka to completely recover from the emotional toll that the disaster has taken on them.

Being involved with an NGO has put Emily “in the thick of it”. Yet despite the physically and emotionally draining work, Emily believes there is some level of honour to actually experience the generosity of the ‘everyday citizen’ as well as that of the global community. Re-

flecting on the September 11 terrorist attacks on the US in 2001, which she points out pales in comparison to the total destruction the tsunami wrought in South Asia, Emily reiterates the way people from all over the world, whether they were directly affected or not, felt as though the disaster happened to them. People from all over the globe shared the sense of loss, hurt and emptiness that followed.

Emily, upon closing her communication, remarks: “The outpouring of support from abroad has been amazing. Personally, Rosanna and I received letters from all over the world expressing

concern and sharing stories of how people were giving what they could – financial or otherwise. It was special to feel such a sense of ‘oneness’. It was like a web of love and support was being spun around the world.”

Hopefully this web of support will not diminish in the months and years ahead, as the work to recover continues. The Jamaica OutPost encourages all our readers to contribute to the recovery effort, now and in the future. We have listed several ways for you to contribute directly to the organisations that Emily and Rosanna work for. We can assure you that all donations will go to those in need.



Rosanna out in the field (Photo courtesy of E. Paul)

Any comments?
Please send to
jamaicaoutpost@hotmail.com



Join in the discussion on THURSDAY February 10
from 9PM to 10PM
www.jamaicaoutpost.com

Creating and maintaining healthy same-gender relationships in a homophobic climate.

OUTFORUM

J-FLAG UNDERGOES MAJOR RESTRUCTURING

By Jason Simmonds, The Jamaica OutPost Contributor

The island's gay rights advocacy organisation, The Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-Sexuals and Gays (J-FLAG), started the New Year under a new management team. The new management committee now has a total of six members, led by two team leaders, Karlene and Gareth. The organisation also has a salaried administrative assistant, who will carry out day-to-day activities in the office and help to maintain the available

help-line. The restructuring also included a change of office space, from what used to be the resource room to a more private office still within the JAS offices. Some highlights at the organisation during 2004 includes representations at two major conferences for human rights defenders in Europe; one sponsored by the European Union and another by ARC international. JFLAG was also present at the Latin American

Human Rights Defenders Conference held in Sao Paulo, as one of two representatives of human rights advocates in Jamaica. The organisation is currently being represented on a U.S. speakers' tour organized by OUTfront, a program by Amnesty International on GLBT human rights. Efforts to contact J-FLAG about the nature of the message they will be presenting during the tour were unsuccessful.



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(Misunderstanding Cont'd from page 1)

Let's take a look at our Jamaican dialect, for example. Take a visit to any of our schools one fine day and check to see if any of the blackboards have the word 'Patois' as the subject for the day. None, I thee declare. *Nat one a dem*. Oh, excuse me! Nevertheless, the vast majority of us Jamaicans are so fluent in our 'colourful' language! Is the Jamaican Creole not a cultural element of our society? In fact, Miss Lou (aka the Honourable Dr. Louise Bennett-Coverley) has actually shown the Jamaican people and the world alike that the Jamaican dialect is indeed a very important aspect of our culture making references along the way to the many sayings her 'Auntie Roachie' told her.

In a letter to the editor of The Jamaica Gleaner dated October 6, 2004, one S. Escoffery, who resides in Brooklyn New York, encourages Jamaica to maintain her culture. He further reproves requests for any change thereof, be it by multinational gay rights organisations or companies like Puma when they issue codes of conduct to Dancehall artistes, calling these requests an insult to Jamaica, her people and her culture. His admonition was in response to the many protests last year against the Dancehall artistes who have been spreading the precious gospel that another aspect of Jamaica's culture is homophobia. Remember Shabba Ranks? Don't worry. You are not alone here for I don't either!! What is the lesson we have learnt?

As Jamaica observes Black History Month (following the culture of the African Americans of the U.S.A.) let's look at the following quote made by Martin Luther King, Jr.:

"In the end we will remember, not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

FOCUS ON: Emily Paul

By Anthony Hron, The Jamaica OutPost Contributor

Emily first came to Jamaica in 1998 as part of a study abroad program offered at the School for International Training (SIT) in the U.S. It was then that she began working with Jamaica's lesbian and female bisexual community through a support group founded by Jamaica AIDS Support (JAS). At the end of her studies, she returned to the US but moved back to Jamaica in June of 1999. This time, she volunteered with JFLAG, soon becoming the Women's Coordinator, and was employed by JAS to develop their women's group. With Emily's help, JFLAG received a small grant from the Astraea Foundation. The organisation hired Emily as their first Programme Coordinator in 2000 and she brought her Women's Group portfolio with her. These were exciting times for LGBT advocacy; and Emily was involved in most of the efforts. She ran the small office and Hotline, organised monthly social gatherings for the community and bi-weekly support meetings for the women, and helped legitimize JFLAG's work locally and abroad. One of her last major accomplishments before returning to the U.S. in October of 2001 was to submit a successful grant proposal to the Global Fund for Women, which allowed the Women's Group to test its wings as an independent organisation, rechristened 'Women for Women'. Although Emily made many great contributions during her time in Jamaica, for those who knew her, she will be remembered most fondly for her wonderful, enthusiastic spirit, her willingness to help anyone in need, and her capacity to treat everyone with love and respect. The Jamaica OutPost extends its sincerest thanks and blessing to Emily for all her efforts on behalf of the LGBT community here and abroad.

THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF ROBERT CORK



LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

When: Jan 6, 2004.
From Where: Kingston

Ian [Boyne's] view of homosexuality is not new to the fraternity and brings to the forefront Ian's perception of even his relationship; the so call str8 men think that women are to be good cooks, home keepers and give them sex. Now because a man does not fit in that slot then two men together must be only to have sex with each other. It is therefore our responsibility to change this perspective, but how can we convince them? I doubt they will ever understand. I must tell you that Ian's ability to be heard is that of his affiliation with the media, because otherwise what he wrote is just as dumb as the illiterate on the street. The man is an educated idiot with respect to gay issues and just wants to be heard.

SPECIAL NOTICE

We are compiling a directory of Caribbean GLBT organizations. Please contact us with information about the GLBT organizations in your community.

Last Month's OutPoll Results

Do you plan to live a less closeted life in 2005?

YES 52% NO 36% UNSURE 12%



Question:

Are you personally acquainted with anyone living with the HIV virus or AIDS?

Yes / No

VOTE ONLINE:

www.jamaicaoutpost.com
Click on: OutPoll

Health & Wellness

DEPRESSION AND THE GLBT COMMUNITY

This may seem to be the most inopportune time to talk about depression. It is for me because it has been too late for a friend. Hence, this is for the many who are still alive amongst us. When I was a teenager and realized I was gay, it was the most traumatic thing I thought could have happened to me, ever. I was so afraid to talk to anyone about the feelings I was having. I went to one of the traditional high schools that had very good guidance councillors but I was still afraid of 'letting out' the secret I had inside. Although people could have looked at me and wondered if I was gay, my public behaviour to refute such a 'slant' taught me to deny the true 'me' to myself. It made me very sad. I went to church. I prayed for my 'sin' to go away – even before I

was sexually active with other men. It was unrelenting. I became severely depressed. No one could reach through to me. I thought no one else understood what I was going through. I knew no other gay person to talk to. And the bottom line was this: I was afraid of social rejection and potential harm. I even started to entertain thoughts of putting an end to it all.

I turned to myself for help. I started finding ways to help myself from within. I would spend my free time just thinking about my life, what I wanted to become when I left high school. That became my own form of escapism. One thing is certain. I have survived it all. Through the thick and the thin, I made it through the pain and the lack of inner self-worth. Brothers, sisters, your life is worth more than what you have

been 'cultured' to believe. You, too, have a right to life. You, too, should feel free to live, to shine, to fly, to smile - and to love. I would like to share with you a few lines from one of my very favourite songs:

*"When the shadows
are closing in
And your spirit diminishing
Just remember you're not alone
And love will be there
To guide you home"*

I recommend you get a copy of 'Anytime You Need A Friend' by Mariah Carey and listen to this song carefully in the dark, alone. I cannot tell you what you will discover. That part is your fate and you are the sole bearer of the key to your destiny.

"Love will make it alright."
– Mariah Carey

International News

U.S. BLACK GAY ADVOCACY GROUP UNVEILS NEW VISION

A new statement of mission and vision for the U.S. based National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC) has been approved by the organisation's Board of Directors at an annual board retreat in Washington D.C. this year. The new mission and vision statements of the organisation includes a recommitment to advocating for equal marriage rights within African American communities as well as a continued focus on other issues that affect and relate to the Black gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) community. The announcement was made on February 1, to coincide with the month-long

celebrations of Black History Month in the United States of America. The adoption of a new motto, "Fairness for Our Families," was also a part of the renewal and refocus of the organisation for 2005.

"I am very pleased that we will continue to be engaged in public policy and public advocacy on marriage and other issues this year," affirms Board President Keith Boykin, in a release from the organisation, highlighting the need for GLBT families, including those of African decent, to be equally regarded with the dignity and respect as heterosexual families. He further pointed out that the current concept of family is

not single-dimensional and by this accord, fighting for fairness for Black GLBT families in every aspect will be a priority throughout 2005.

The National Black Justice Coalition is a civil rights organization of Black lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and our allies dedicated to fostering equality by fighting racism and homophobia. The Coalition advocates for social justice by educating and mobilizing opinion leaders, including elected officials, clergy, and media, with a focus on Black communities.

For more information, please visit their website: www.nbjcoalition.org