This term: Politics in Focus

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Shamanism
Special creative writing section

...and lots more
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Such to everyone’s profound disbelief I’ve managed to do it again, albeit late, and produced another magazine! What was supposed to be the michaelmas edition is now the lent edition. Thanks to everyone who sent letters and emails praising or giving feedback on the Easter issue, they were all appreciated. This term [no definition] gets political and focuses on the political agenda for the LBGT community, we also have a special section on the pride season gone by just to make everyone glad that they are back in Cambridge. Once again, do not hesitate to email if you there is something you want to raise or get off your chest. Have a good year.

Editor’s Shout-
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I question whether politics is a relevant force in our lives or is it all about old men chucking abuse at one another.

“Labels are for filing.
Labels are for clothing.
Labels are not for people.”
-Martina Navratilova

POLITICS IN FOCUS
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The views expressed in [no definition] do not necessarily represent the views of CUSU LBGT, contributors do so out of their own good will retaining any rights and jurisdiction over their articles.
CUSU LBGT is an autonomous campaign of the Cambridge University Student’s Union.
Politics... bah humbug!

Love it or loathe it there is no getting away from it.

I am apolitical. Apathetic towards politics. I would like to think of myself as a free-thinking, non-conforming, responsibly-acting, non-persuadable individual who is unaroused by the rigidity, bickering and back-stabbing that party politics only has to offer me.

In fact, thinking about it now, my political views cut across so many party lines that come election time I would have more coloured ribbons hanging from me than a Gay Pride parade. Whilst I can be easily tempted to dip my toes into the shindigs of university political associations (dearest Julia Beck at least deserves a mention here), my views are something personal to me that can neither be bought nor bargained for in an attempt to give a bunch of jumped-up idiots a fat pay packet just to throw abuse at each other as though the Palace of Westminster was a school playground. No way am I going to enter into any kind of booth if all I'm expecting is merely a piece of paper with the names of old men on it.

However, when I start going off on one like now (and trust me I’ve slimmed that last paragraph down five times already) I sometimes recall an advertisement that appears around election time which soon shuts me up. In this advert, two ordinary looking friends, Tom and Mike, start a conversation in an ordinary looking pub. But when Mike adamantly states he doesn’t “do politics”, Tom takes him up on his word, stopping him from complaining about everything from the price of alcohol to the time the pub closes to the state of the streets when they walk back home. As conversation quickly dries up, Mike realises that politics affects almost every aspect of his life, and that perhaps he does “do politics” after all.

Then I imagine a similar situation where I assume Mike’s position. I start complaining. Why is homophobia not tackled in our schools? Why may I be prevented from marrying my long-term partner? Why may I be discriminated against by insurance companies, prospective employers and public services just on the grounds of my sexuality? And I arrive at the same realisation that our friend Mike in the advert arrives at. Politics.

So whilst I care about all of these issues, and the wider issues facing society at large, I remain sat on my backside simply bitching about how I don’t like the status quo and in doing so contribute to the mindset of 40% of our population that didn’t vote in the 2005 election. Of course there isn’t going to be one party tailored to my myriad beliefs (gosh this isn’t Germany) but my outright refusal to acknowledge the wider structures that are shaping how I live my life, not just as a gay man in the UK, but as a citizen of this country means that I’m in no position to stand up against any injustice that I may experience. Who is most at fault here? The people who push oppressive legislation through Parliament? Or people like me and our ineptitude in wanting to do anything about it? In the wise words of Plato, “The price of apathy towards public affairs is to be ruled by evil men.”
Since the last issue of No Definition there have been some pretty significant changes to the CUSU LBGT Exec: I took over the Presidency in Easter term and it was decided at Open Meeting that the Chair and I should run the campaign as an equal coalition. Unfortunately, we had to say goodbye to our Computing Officer, Mike Horridge and Reps Co-ordinator, Ingrid Nielsen, both of whom graduated at the end of last year, and Kate Setterfield, Women’s Officer who is on her year abroad. Since then, Alex Wilshaw, Communications Officer has been covering the computing role and we are very pleased to welcome Jasper Adamson as our new Reps Co-ordinator. Jasper hopes to promote interaction between College Reps and will be in touch with them soon to organise some events.

CUSU LBGT has seen a fantastic beginning to the year with the Freshers’ Barbeque, which was arranged in conjunction with Suzy Milburn, New Hall Rep. The barbeque was well-attended and provided a relaxed setting for Freshers to meet each other, with the incentive of free food and drink! Our other main event was the Precious launch night with pre-drinks at the Fountain Inn. There were around 180 people at the Fountain and as I’m sure you all know, Precious was absolutely packed!

All of the Exec have been pretty busy since the start of term with campaign business. Rob Field, Socials & Welfare Officer and I have been running a support group in conjunction St Edward’s Church for anyone reconciling their sexuality with their religion. Meanwhile, Carol Johnson who used to share the Grad post has recently taken on the role independently; she has organised grad drinks, which will be followed by a grad formal later in the term. No doubt you will have bumped into our Ents Officers, Noel Cochrane and James Trafford who continue to work with Precious to promote and run the weekly club night at Club22. Josh Robinson, Campaigns Officer has been penning quite a few letters on our behalf, one which urges the government to reconsider its apparent decision to water down gay rights legislation. Emma has been hosting the weekly women’s coffee meeting at Clowns, which compliments Rob’s Sunday Social. I know Rob is always looking for new ideas for Sunday Social, so if you’d like to suggest an event, just give him a shout (soical@cusu-lbgt.com).

The Exec’s focus at the moment is on organising Awareness Week, which aims to promote understanding of LBGT issues. There will be a huge range of events including: a launch party, film screenings and guest speakers. If you have any suggestions that you’d like us to take on board, please feel free to get in touch.

I hope you’ve all had a great Michaelmas Term especially if it’s your first term in Cambridge! Hopefully I will see many of you at the next Open Meeting on Friday 24th November, where you will have the opportunity to tell the Exec what you want them to do for you. In the meantime, drop me any email you have any questions or suggestions.

Col
President 2006 CUSU LBGT

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Cross campus

I’ve been reading your website and looking through the fantastic work that you’ve been doing at CUSU, and it is great to see other Student Union bodies taking LGBT representation as seriously as we do here at Loughborough Students’ Union.

As an integral body of Loughborough Students’ Union, we’re committed to working in three broad areas: socials, welfare and campaigning. We recognise that, like everyone else in society, the people of the LGBT community have varying needs and tastes and so we try to make sure that everyone can be involved – from using our confidential “drop-in” service to going on socials to G-A-Y and the Nightingale - and everything else we offer that sits somewhere in between the two.

Loughborough can be a complex place to work as a Union as it also contains two Further Education colleges. Our efforts to involve the constituent colleges and our refusal to be left on the side-lines of the colleges has led to us being named the NUS’s Further Education LGBT Society of the Year 2006. We’ve even got our first Committee Officer from the RNIB College this year, which has improved relations with the colleges significantly.

As any University which is predominantly male, and especially being a sports and engineering institution, the macho attitudes can create an almost impermeable wall of silence around LGBT topics, as students are afraid to ‘come out’ due fear of a loss of respect from peers. Our challenge has been to shatter illusions about the LGBT community, encourage debate and show that the LGBT community is an inclusive one and my Association is freely accessible by anyone that wants or needs its help and services. With this in mind we’ll be holding a major “Out in Sport” event in March 2007, with serious (and fun!) sports which we hope will help remove the “gays can’t do sports” myth; all of you at Cambridge are more than welcome to join in!

I’m proud of the work that my committee have done here in Loughborough in helping to shape the LLGBTA into the active organisation it is today – make sure you at CUSU continue to support your LBGT group, and get involved!

Babak Erfani
Chair,
Loughborough Students’ LGBT Association
www.lufbra.net/llgbta   llgbta@lufbra.net

Dear Sir,

How far is anti-discrimination discriminatory?

Recently I received a careers guide from my college LBGT officer that had been published by Stonewall and Credit Suisse and was aimed at gay men such as myself who were looking for possible careers in the big wide world. While on first impressions I found this to be a worthy and positive publication, it began to dawn on me how many companies in this guide were attempting to play on the fears of LBGT people in order to entice them into the corporate machine. The promises of ‘a tolerant environment’, ‘friendly workplaces’ and ‘recruitment without bias’ that were littering this guide became tiresome as though all other companies would be intolerant, unfriendly and biased. After a while and I started asking myself, surely ALL employers should be proud of this and working towards such goals and not just using it as a recruitment ploy. I question how far companies will exploit this situation for their image and gain. Will we get to the stage where quotas are brought in for numbers of LBGT people in a company and have companies competing with each other? Whilst this would certain advantage you and I we ought to think about how sincere this motives are.

Yours.
DFP.

Dear Editor,

Fantastic magazine last term. The facelift and revised content was exactly what Cambridge students should be putting out there.

May we continue to see more of the same.

Regards,

JF

Any chance of more pictures like those on the front cover of the last magazine?

Hugs,
Undisclosed

Comments on articles in this issue, pressing opinions about current affairs, a general whinge

Send all your letters to editor@cusu-lbgt.com
The past decade has been an exciting time for gay rights; gay men and women can form legal partnerships, they can consent to sex at the same age as their straight peers, and they can go and fight in Iraq. Much progress has been made, yet a gay man and a straight man are still placed in markedly different legal divisions. In 1998 the passage of the Human Rights Act (HRA) heralded a potentially weighty addition to the arsenal of those who seek a levelling of the playing field. How effective it would be would depend on the judges who were entrusted with this new power. As the Act begins to settle into place the question is ‘Have our judges delivered?’

The Bad Old Days

In 1995 three men and one woman were dishonourably discharged from the Armed Forces. That they had impeccable service records and showed sincere dedication to their country was not in question; the problem was that they were gay. Led by the chief applicant, Mr. Smith, the group took their case to the Court of Appeal to challenge this overt discrimination. The Government (very helpfully) acknowledged that it was indeed violating fundamental human rights but claimed that this was absolutely necessary ‘in the interests of national security.’

Eventually these soldiers brought the case to Europe, where European judges pointed out the complete fallacy of the so-called security considerations. In its considered opinion the European Court of Human Rights found that the service of straight soldiers would not be undermined by the dishonour of having to work alongside gay people, as the MOD had effectively suggested. That the Ministry’s crude, almost schoolboy, homophobic discrimination sailed through the English courts unscathed with its lunacy only being uncovered on appeal in Europe definitively shows how gay rights resided abroad. This sort of inequality is what the HRA can tackle.

The Potential for Change

If the past is of a helpless and weak judiciary unable to defend gay rights, what is the present and future? The recent case of Ghadian v. Godin-Mendoza (2004), decided with the new HRA in force, presents a welcome glimmer of hope. Here, a gay couple had cohabited in a rented flat for many years until one of them died. The deceased was, however, the sole registered tenant of the flat. This potentially meant that his partner would be evicted from his home and be denied any claim to the tenancy. However, the Rent Act 1977 ensures that this does not happen for long-term straight couples (married or not): it protects the partner of a tenant, demanding only that the couple ‘were living as husband and wife’. The question was whether two gay men could really be considered to be living as husband and wife, if not, then they would be denied those rights enjoyed by their straight counterparts.

The decision of the House of Lords (the most senior court in the UK) made clear the potential of the HRA as it stated that there was no sensible reason to discriminate against gay people in this context. The majority of the court explicitly recognised that the love, affection and long-term commitment which typifies a marriage can exist in both gay
and straight partnerships. Having done this the judges then proactively deployed the powers granted by the HRA and ensured equality for the claimant.

Yet venerated human rights lawyer, Professor Wintemute, is not overjoyed at this conclusion. He points out that the British Judiciary was simply following a recent European case and so they were bound to come to the conclusion they did. Wintemute is right to postpone the festivities because even with this European guidance Lord Millett, one of our most senior judges, refused to accept that two men could live as husband and wife. In a speech laden with what are hopelessly long outdated beliefs he declares that the phrases ‘his husband’ and ‘her wife’ are, socially, ‘a nonsense…a man cannot have a husband and a woman cannot have a wife.’ It is hoped that no gay person ever finds himself relying upon Lord Millett to uphold his basic human rights, for his prospects of success will not be healthy.

The Hurdle

As the majority decision in Ghaidan shows, the HRA can lead to increased gay equality and Professor Wintemute does suggest that it is gay people who will benefit most from the Act - yet such hopes will only be realised if the judiciary is actually prepared to allow the realisation of such equality. Lord Millett’s speech demonstrates how it cannot be assumed that such a progressive attitude is a given.

No discussion of the judiciary’s attitude towards gay equality would be worthwhile without considering two quite stunning criminal cases. The first is Brown, a case in which a group of consenting gay men had performed sadomasochistic acts. This led to minor, non-hospitalising injuries. The authorities became aware of these activities and prosecuted, the case ending up in the House of Lords. The question to be answered was whether or not someone may lawfully consent to an injury during sex (as one can consent during, for example, a boxing match). Our senior judges decided that these men could not consent and, with famously flimsy and almost universally criticised reasoning, found them guilty of several assault charges, and did so with thinly-veiled disgust and with much legally unnecessary moralising.

One might be able to stomach the decision in Brown if it were not for the decision in Wilson which followed. In this case a husband, acting under his wife’s instructions, branded his initials on his wife’s buttocks using a red-hot poker. The wife suffered serious scarring and had to be admitted to hospital. The case made it to the Court of Appeal where the senior judge was just as disgusted as those in Brown. He was disgusted however, not at Wilson’s recreational activities, but that anyone would dare prosecute a husband for what he gets up to with his wife in the sanctity of ‘the matrimonial home’. The judge, however, had to show how this case was different from Brown in its relevant facts. On this point he failed entirely, indeed one’s overriding impression is that of a man grasping at straws. Truly the only discernable difference is that pointed out by legal academic Paul Roberts: in Brown the sex involved gay men, in Wilson it involved a man and wife. The married couple’s privacy was upheld and the gay men were criminalised.

Brown and Wilson are both pre-HRA but they sadly are not cases from far back in the archives. The problem with the Human Rights Act is that it is only as good as those judges who apply it. The judges who decided those cases are amongst the judges to whom the potentially great tool of the HRA has been given.

Hopes Dashed?

After the highs of 2004 have come the lows of 2006. Two key gay rights cases this year do little to encourage optimism for those who wish sexuality to be irrelevant when determining legal protection.

First is the very recent case of Wilkinson, which highlights how the judiciary may limit the HRA. Here a lesbian couple who were validly married in Canada applied for that marriage to be recognised in the UK (as any marriage lawfully conducted abroad is). The judge ruled that English law rejected their marriage and would only consider them to be civil partners; a title which undoubtedly has much less resonance, as well as slightly different rights. In explaining his decision the judge strays into what Peter Tatchell describes as reasoning worthy of ‘Christian fundamentalists of the rightwing Evangelical Alliance.’ He talks of the need to preserve
marriage, that ‘age-old institution’, and ensure that it remains both ‘respected and respectable’. The inference is unavoidable: open marriage up to gay people and it will become tarnished.

This case has been unhappily coupled with the second gay rights regression of this year. In the case of M v. Secretary of State, the courts held that it was acceptable for M, a lesbian living with another woman, to have to pay more child support than she would if she lived with a man. When she claimed that this violated the HRA she was blithely waved away with the astonishing explanation that homosexual relationships do not fall within the protection of the HRA and so the UK had the right to discriminate if it so chose to. This case passed by a strong majority, the only voice in disagreement being that of (the mighty and, it is submitted, all round fantastic) Baroness Hale, who pointed out that there can be no lawful discrimination without adequate justification. The only rationale she could see here was ‘the historical discrimination which has existed between homosexuals and heterosexuals’ in the law. Her Ladyship was not convinced that the fact that gays have long endured discrimination was tantamount to a convincing justification for the continuation of such discrimination.

As stated at the outset, it is clear to see that gay rights have come an incredibly long way in the last ten years, and with the HRA the legal gap between gay and straight can be narrowed. However, the reality is that this cannot be done without the judiciary’s co-operation. They must return to the progressive days of Ghaidan, rather than continuing along their current unhappy path of narrow interpretation and denial of freedoms. It is vital that our judges get on side, and quick, otherwise the great opportunity presented by the HRA will have been wasted.

Thanks to Professor Wintemute, King’s College London, for his guidance.

Any comments on this or any other article? Think you can write better and want to contribute? Email us, editor@cusu-lbgt.com
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Blair’s “baby”, the Human Rights Act, came into force on October 2nd 2000, incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights into English law. As his baby, one would expect the Human Rights Act (HRA) to be cradled gently in Daddy Blair’s arms; nurtured and cared for, be given a chance to mature and develop into a bedrock of legal rights protection. The reality is not quite so perfect.

Whilst certain rights improved, the latest infuriating act (in a series) has been Blair’s backing of the decision of Ruth Kelly, Communities Secretary, to delay the implementation of a vital piece of legislation that would accord more rights to homosexuals. In an article in the Observer (October 15th 2006) Blair is described as having given full backing to Kelly, who is allegedly working on the integration of, as well as tolerance for, all persons in communities across the UK.

Not only would the legislation do such things as allow homosexual couples to share bedrooms in hotels that discriminate against such persons, but lesbian couples would be able to have IVF treatment, where in some places they are barred from treatment because of their sexuality. Perhaps a view of some of society is that homosexual couples are too dangerous to have children. Whatever the rumour, homosexual couples are just as capable of bringing children up as heterosexual couples are. Such statements about the dangerousness of homosexual child-rearing are pure discrimination, lacking in the way of empirical evidence and the new legislation would curb such arbitrary prejudice.

The legislation would also disallow schools (faith schools are the prime perpetrators of this) from saying: “No entry to this school; you’re a gay”. This is a crucial aspect of the legislation attempting to tackle discrimination at school. Surely this is the best place to start to tackle institutionalised homophobia? That is of course, unless you are, like Ms. Kelly, a devout Catholic. Perhaps Kelly is able to disentangle her politics and her religious conviction? She has abstained from nearly every (if not all) votes concerning gay legislation working its way through Parliament since 1997. A shocking fact, and a good indicator that Kelly is no more committed to gay rights than Bush is committed to letting the illegally detained prisoners of Guantanamo Bay out.

And what of Blair and his human rights tendencies? Personally, he is preferable when compared to the old-guard Tories, (so one thing to be thankful for), but his commitments to the HRA are looking more and more dubious as one experiences more of his governance – something quite off-putting for a believer in the importance of human rights. Three examples should be ample evidence of his actions, which have removed vital rights from people. Firstly, The Terrorism Acts – holding suspects without trial for lengths of time that are ever on the increase. The detention of an arrested person normally lasts for a 36 hour period, however, in 2000 the Blairite regime introduced Terrorism Act number one – a seven day holding period, without trial (for terrorist related offences). Not satisfied with this, the Criminal Justice Act 2003 doubled this to 14 days of detention without trial. Then, I am sure we will all recall, the controversy over Blair’s want to hold terror suspects for 90 days without trial; a ‘want’...
that was supported vehemently by The Sun, creating headlines such as: “Traitors” (to the parliamentarians who voted against the proposed legislation). Having been defeated on this, the 2006 Terrorism Act came into force with a holding period of 28 days without trial. A whole month of a life gone; in lots of cases for no legitimate reason whatsoever. This is bad enough on its own, but when one thinks of how much liberty is deprived from merely “suspected” terrorists by control orders one is further shocked and saddened at rights erosion. Is this Blair’s Guantanamo?

Then of course, Blair wanted to “alter” the HRA. The most crucial piece of legislation this country has seen for more than a century and he wishes simply to “alter” it. There has even been talk of repeal – unsurprisingly from the Tories – and one only dreads what UKIP would do with it. It is probable that the Courts would not allow such alterations, and likely that Parliament would not give its assent to them.

Did you know, one can not protest within a square mile of Parliament? The pinnacle of democracy and one can not protest there - to safeguard the government, of course. Is terrorism anymore prevalent nowadays than it ever has been? There is certainly more reporting and awareness, but is there actually a major increase? For some reason we are experiencing a full-scale erosion of our rights which only becomes obvious when looking through the copious statute books – something that the ‘ordinary man on the Clapham Omnibus’ (to use a legal maxim) would not do.

Thirdly and finally is the fundamental issue here: gay rights. Blair’s commitment to rights is all the more dubious over his backing of Kelly. Their stance on this issue is incredible – as Education Secretary Alan Johnson has angrily pointed out – and against all aspects of tolerance and equality. But these rights matter. They should not just matter to around the 3.6 million gay folk in the UK, but to everybody: in a society where Blair advocates pluralism, tolerance and diversity; where we wish to encourage social interaction, lose prejudice and discrimination; people that should care and stand up for those rights that are little by little sinking into the abyss.

Does this get you rushing to put pen to paper? Then we want to hear from you


editor@cusu-lbgt.com

Almost there!

She's coming... january 2006 beta

The Queen of the Gay Social Web

# QueensSpeech.com #
Most of us who consider ourselves rational and politically aware tend to write off the British National Party as a bunch of unimaginative, narrow-minded, racist homophobes. Prepare to change your views. Because Richard Barnbrook, star of the BNP back at the start of May when he won eleven council seats in the borough of Barking and Dagenham, has set out to prove everyone wrong about the values he stands for. It was revealed no more than a week after his victory that, amongst his (surely numerous) achievements, Barnbrook at one time delved into the world of arthouse Marxist gay erotica.

Well, I should point out that he had actually kept modestly quiet about this achievement, but thankfully we now all know better thanks to Searchlight, an anti-fascist organisation, who leaked the story and by doing so ripped the lid off the myth that the BNP are all right-wing alpha-males. At last, we have a BNP candidate who openly demonstrates a love for a man in a sailor suit.

Not only is it refreshing to hear that a man we had assumed to be bigoted and rather repulsive has shown such a broad-minded view towards gay socialism, it’s also a great relief to see such creativity in a party which has, both creatively and politically, seemed so stuck in a rut. For Barnbrook’s masterwork doesn’t sound like any run-of-the-mill porn flick – it sounds like a work of genius.

The film has been described as avant-garde in its daring use of sailors’ outfits, although these feature in the film less than might be imagined due to the brisk narrative which sees two such nautically-costumed characters ripping off each others’ clothes and, in what is presumably an artful piece of cinematography, fondling each other and splashing around in a river together.

Barnbrook’s own literary contribution to the film is evident in the sheer poetry of the script itself. “It bares you like a foreskin’s folds,” one of the characters declares, “you will make yourself a beauty, hard as rusting trucks and slag.” Gay poetry unrivalled even by the great W H Auden. Clearly, this is a great, great piece of cinema. And it is to be welcomed. By embracing gay Marxist porn, the BNP has finally made itself a legitimate party, and one that we should be more than happy to vote for.

It may strike some as a bit of a U-turn – but no more than Labour’s adoption of Conservative values in the late 90s. And let’s face it, since that time there has been a gap in the market for parties with Marxist values. Opportunistic it may be, but we all know that politics now is not about remaining true to a set of values, or even to promises – it’s just about saying what people want to hear. And finally, at long last, the BNP are doing this for a broader spectrum of people than the ignorant, racist portion of society. No more are they saying “out with the darkies and let’s keep our race pure”; now, they are proudly declaring “bring on the erotic gay Marxist films, we’re hard as rusting trucks and slag!”

We all know how the film world works. Mel Gibson made “The Passion of the Christ” because he is a Catholic. Steven Spielberg made “Schindler’s List” because he is a Jew. Tom Cruise made “Mission Impossible 3” because he enjoys senselessly adoring his own face. Why would Richard Barnbrook make a Marxist homosexual film? The answer is very, very simple: because he is a Marxist homosexual. Let’s remember that this was back in 1989, before “Brokeback Mountain” made it pretty much obligatory to have a gay subplot in every film. Barnbrook was bravely expressing his own glorious Marxist gayness – and good for him!

In a way, his inclinations should have been obvious even without the film. It’s an established fact that the biggest homophobes (of which the ranks of the BNP must surely number) are all repressed homosexuals themselves. Barnbrook himself remained pretty silent on the subject. Cynics will suggest that this is because he was too busy kicking the shit out of some gay Marxists to salve his nationalist, sexually repressed conscience. But surely we should give him the benefit of the doubt and assume that it’s because he was too busy giving head.
The Cambridge Prowler is a spotlight on the LBGT community of Cambridge tracking down the latest gossip and issues from across the city. This term we pull a few freshers off the streets and interrogate them about their first weeks.

Name: Josie Fielding  
College: Sidney Sussex  
Subject: Medicine  
Age: 18  

So, freshers’ week is over and the hell-ish stuff has started. How much of freshers’ week do you remember and what were the highlights?

Worryingly I remember all of it!

Has your college made you feel settled and comfortable in your new environment?

Emphatically yes. Sidney is fantastic. Although, it is alarming how fast gossip travels.

What is the most indispensable object in your room and why?

My kettle. For hot chocolate, of course – the elixir of life (apart from alcohol).

Describe how you were looking for your matriculation photograph.

Flustered – since I arrived late…that was a good start…

Out of 10 rate your impressions of the girls/guys in our fine university.

Better than Oxford! The scene is better, or at least what I’ve seen so far. (I come from there, I’m not just subscribing to the Oxbridge rivalry).

“When I leave Cambridge I want to go down in university history for…..”

Cooking gourmet meals for everyone and baking fabulous cakes all the time in spite of having only a Baby Belling and two hobs to do it with.

Name: Joe Upward  
College: Queens’  
Subject: Law  
Age: 19  

How much of freshers’ week do you remember and what were the highlights?

A surprisingly large amount, I’m quite disappointed! Highlights include the pj pub crawl and wandering through the foyer of a hotel by mistake and casually remarking what a nice day it was to a rather perplexed receptionist.

What is the most indispensable object in your room and why?

My GHDs without a doubt! You can straighten with them, iron with them and even trade use of them for someone making a trip to the porters’ lodge when you’ve managed to lock yourself out of your bedroom at 1 in the morning wearing nothing but a dressing gown and a whistle!

What was the first thing you told your parents when they called/you called them?

“I’ve just been shopping and spent all my student loan on clothes and shoes” just to judge their reaction!

Out of 10 rate your impressions of the guys in our fine university.

Probably 7 but 10.5 after a few drinks! Nah there are some pretty fit guys here who have personalities and something interesting to say which is a first for me although then again there are a few slightly odd characters so a couple of points have to come off for that!

If [no definition] was going to track you down on the eve of graduation how would you like to have changed?

I would have liked to have grown 2 inches, mastered the art of eating with chopsticks and become a nicer person who has the ability to ‘impart wisdom’ – I’ve always wanted to do that!

“When I leave Cambridge I want to go down in university history for…..”

Making the best cocktails in the world as well as being a pretty good guy (although I’d settle for going down as just plain pretty :-}
In the few years since I came out to the world as being transsexual, I have been confronted with numerous arguments as to exactly why who and what I am is an aberration. Those people who have homosexuality as an inherent part of their personality receive their fair share of abuse even in today’s supposedly tolerant climate. In the eyes of the bigots, I have taken one step even further, and have denied that my flesh is properly oriented, never mind my emotions or sexual preferences. Arguments such as being ‘against nature’ and ‘against God’ are easy to find. Dipping into the popular media every week is all it takes to uncover such opinions on those who dare to be anything but resolutely heterosexual. Let’s face it, despite the work of equal rights and tolerance organisations, the flavour of the day is still vanilla.

These arguments stick in my craw, as they would with anyone else who is the target of these comments. I do believe that everyone is entitled to their opinion, but with a specific condition: the opinion should be well informed. In the case of those who condemn my transexuality on religious grounds, I have decided that enough is enough. It is time to take a stand. I find it hard enough to keep my trap shut most of the time as it is, and this sort of provocation has forced me to drag out my soapbox. Please notice how well I stand on it. As a tranny I take some pride in my poise and grace, thank you so very much.

I can understand why people might attack transsexuality if their own religion forbids such behaviour – although most people who say this don’t know exactly where or how this happens. It’s easier to spout other people’s research than do any oneself, after all. However, not every religion condemns transgenderism. Indeed, some of them actively promote such activities. Take shamanism for example. While not a religion per se, shamanic practice is the oldest known form of spirituality on the planet, and is spread right across the globe. As the unifying form of religion that gave rise to identifiable practices in almost every other religion, it may well be the great-grandparent of every other spiritual path.

Shamanism often requires the practitioner to behave in a manner that is considered to be unacceptable to other people. Shamans know that conventional rules do not apply to them; they are expected to do what is necessary, not what is comfortable. They exist solely to protect their people, even at the expense of their own life, comfort, or the social conventions of their community. In shamanic cultures the prevailing attitude towards sexuality and gender is suspended so the shaman can function properly. There are communities where transvestitism is not only tolerated in shamans, but is actually compulsory in certain situations. In Korea, almost every shaman is female. In Korean shamanism, males are permitted to become shamans, but in doing so they need to suspend their male identity, and as such they are expected to act and dress as women.

This is not an unprecedented example. While the Siberian shamans are highly masculine at first glance, the Siberian shamanic costume often displays a number of female symbols. This is taken to its logical extreme by the Chukchi tribe in the North-Eastern ranges of Siberia, who dress like the female spirits they work with, perform female duties in their domestic life, and even speak the language that is traditionally used by women. That the women have a totally separate language of their own shows that the differences between the sexes in that community are considerable, and this makes the shamanic transvestites all the more remarkable. The logic behind it is that the cross-dressing symbolises the marriage of the shaman to a female spirit, so he in effect spiritually becomes one with the female entity.

There are other examples. While the actual act of being a transvestite may not be prominent in their culture, Alaskan Inuit shamans do perform distinctly feminine rites, including giving birth. Physically, this is impossible, but the rite is enacted so completely that it is not unknown for the shaman to experience the rigours of childbirth, including a quantity of...
blood being produced from the shaman’s genitals.

North American Indians had a long-standing tradition of transvestite behaviour. The term for this is berdache, and these individuals would adopt the female role, in accordance with social conventions. Unlike the modern attitude towards transgenderism, a berdache was very well respected. They did not adopt the female role due to any personal preference. A berdache would be instructed to adopt the role during a fasting vision quest, which was one of the rites of passage required to attain full manhood. A berdache was required to follow the instructions to become female, or it was thought that the spirit of the Moon would strike them dead. Becoming a berdache was not such a bad thing, however. They had considerable powers of prophecy. They also excelled at any task traditionally performed by women. The berdache were supposedly extremely clever, and expert gamblers. Reputedly, they were also quite shameless in their behaviour, but that did not reduce the respect that their people paid to them, and they were even taken as wives by men who undoubtedly would achieve status and respect by doing so.

These were not the only gender divergent examples from the North American Indian culture. Those who showed cowardice in battle would be forced to live as women, but unlike the berdache class, who displayed a degree of spiritual power, these men were treated as cowards, and shown nothing but contempt.

Another excellent example of the transvestite shaman is found in Scandinavian culture. According to the myths of the Norse people, the goddess Freyja brought magic from her own people, the Vanir, and taught it to the Aesir (the other family of Norse deities). However, this magic (known as seidr or galdr) was a feminine form of energy only associated with women. In order to perform seidr magic, a male would have to dress as a woman. Odin, determined to learn the magic, does actually dress as a woman to do so. His counterparts find his cross-dressing amusing, but on seeing that his actions have granted him access to the seidr magic, the amusement is replaced by understanding and respect.

In the Norse shamanic tradition, it became not only acceptable but necessary for shamans to dress as women if they wished to perform ritual magic that was associated with seidr.

There are yet more examples. Ancient Egyptian priests performed a number of different practices that resulted in their appearing more feminine. A priest would have to bathe several times a day, and also shave all the hair off their bodies. Neither of these acts were gender-biased, but were designed to keep the body completely pure and free from any kind of taint when inside the temple and the presence of the gods. However, they also wore a very specific garment, known as the sheath dress. This garment was the traditional and very common garment worn by women. Generally speaking, most Egyptian priests dressed in female clothes.

In the later Ptolemaic and Roman periods, devotees of the cult of Isis would take this much further. There were certain rites that were traditionally performed by women. Female priests did exist, but male Isis priests would go so far as to practice self-castration so that their role in such rites would be permissible.

It is not unusual to find such examples in shamanic culture. The energies of the world tend to be broken down into masculine and feminine. Such division of the world is a concept that comes from almost every culture. In order to properly manipulate the energies of the world, a shaman has to be fully attuned to both. Unless a tribe has specific male shamans and female shamans for individual energy types (which is not unheard of) then a single shaman needs to be able to switch gender roles, spiritually speaking, or become a combination of both.

So how does this influence my attitude towards those who call me a freak for wanting to rid myself of my masculine body and live life as a woman? It certainly reassures me that I am not completely insane. If we consider the world in chronological terms, most modern religions are still in their infancy, especially when compared to shamanic practices that are measured in tens of thousands of years. Cave drawings from humanity’s very earliest recorded history depict shamanic rituals that are still identifiable today. Spiritually speaking, it has been acceptable and even promoted for thousands of years. As a practitioner of shamanic spirituality and a transsexual I do not believe I am in any way offensive to nature. On the contrary, a shaman knows that those who refuse to listen to the promptings of their body and soul are denying the reality of their existence. This is not the sort of thing I want to do.

I am transsexual. I am not ashamed of it. I listen to my inner self. I am in touch with my body, and no matter what people may say,
For all those a little hesitant about Brighton Pride – don’t be! This year’s (2006) Pride was definitely one of the highlights of my summer. Like one of my friends said; ‘what more could you want, thousands of LGBT people right by the sea, the wind caressing your hair, the sun beaming down on your back, my only recommendation is to get in there!’ Being the quaint little closet case I am, this was to be my first Pride and I couldn’t wait to get stuck in. Armed with my digital camera and a whole lot of lipgloss, (one should always be prepared in light of some unexpected lip action) I met my friends at an unearthly hour on Saturday morning at Victoria station. The parade was to start at 11am and we wished to be down well before then in the hopes of getting a good spot. The Southern Railway Company was doing four for the price of two tickets that sunny August morning; an added bonus and for me sure proof of the joys that were to follow.

Tip number one for all those who head to Pride, make sure to get out money first thing. This was a little snippet of information my friend revealed to me on the way. Although Pride is free - in fact it is one of the biggest free outdoor parties in the UK - the food, drinks (with the exception of water) and most importantly the rides are not, as it turned out I was going to need a lot more than lipgloss if I wanted to maximise my Pride experience.

So off we went, me being the token newbie amongst my friends; a Pride Virgin. I’d visited Soho Pride the week before in London but I was soon to realise that it was nothing compared to Brighton. For most Soho Pride is more or less an appetiser before the main meal, a good time but by no means the highlight of it all. I’d heard of the wonders of the Brighton scene and I was understandably looking forward to witnessing such a large gathering of LGBT people. I was a bundle of excited nerves, I wanted to see and experience all Pride had to offer.

For those who don’t
know, and I certainly didn’t, Brighton Pride is a registered charity in England and Wales dedicated to the promotion of all things LGBT as well as raising awareness over the issues concerning the LGBT community. This year’s theme was the Carry On films with a celebrity appearance from Barbara Windsor, I was lucky enough to spot her on one of the floats, waving proudly and grinning away whilst two scantily clad male dancers twirled around her in teeny white hotpants; happily personifying the campness of the Carry On films with their flailing arms. After all what was Pride without its clichés?

The parade stretched on for what seemed like miles and probably was. All along the seafront people stood cheering and waving, whilst various organisations marched on by on floats, there were many a Drag King and Queen blowing kisses, a luscious display of very scantily clad Gaydar radio models handing out whistles and stickers and a very serious looking bunch from Amnesty International waving pink batons in the air. To be honest the parade went by in a blur, one thing was for sure however, and there are a multitude of organisations in support of Pride.

Once the parade was over my friends and I soon followed its trail to Preston Park, experiencing all sorts of mystical wonders along the way. Bubbles floated along lazily, whistles blared and factions of the fancy dress crew had broken off into the streets and fluttered on by merrily singing. As I neared Preston Park the floor literally became covered with unused condoms as a kindly gentleman from a window in a flat above scattered them across the pavement. Clearly he thought some Pride goers would need them later on!

Nothing prepared me for the sight I faced once I entered the park however. I stood spinning round in awe at what were possibly the biggest carnival rides in history. I suddenly felt like Charlie when he first clapped eyes on the Chocolate Factory. Mechanical arms towered above trees whizzing people round and round in a crazy blur. A giant ball attached to bungee rope bounced screaming people up and down. Thousands milled around various giant tents, music pulsating through their structure making it seem alive. We plonked ourselves down on the floor for a quick fag (of the smoking kind) and a look at the map. Unfortunately, it’d been no longer than ten minutes when I started to notice a rather unhealthy red tinge to my friend’s skin. Tip two: don’t leave you’re sunscreen at home, temperatures that day were a record high and as a result a couple of my friend came back sporting a deep crimson crap
look.

The Gaydar radio tent was oddly cool inside; I craned my neck towards the ceiling expecting to catch sight of a fan only for my eyes to be met by strobe lights flashing on muscular men gyrating to Madonna. I was suddenly feeling a tad bit out of place. After a small stint in the Gaydar tent I chilled out besides the booming speakers of the Herbal High stall which according to the banner offered a bewildering variety of legal drugs for those willing to part with a minimum of £10. I watched as a little 3-year old girl boogied on down to the Jungle House music that blasted out around her. I could only assume her parents owned the stall.

Whilst there I got talking to two topless gay men in gold rimmed cowboy hats and matching jeans, everyone was so friendly, besides I was all on my lonesome as my friends had decided to spend the next forty minutes queuing for the loos. Tip three: try if you can to go before you get to the park as the queues are just ridiculous, and if you find yourself in a desperate position make sure you find some trees well away from the Police stall.

Pride is more than just a party and as I began to make my way over to the Candybar tent with my friends I was pleasantly overwhelmed by various stalls promoting LGBT issues. There was Amnesty International, exulting love to be a human right, the Brighton Mind Out LGBT Mental Health Pro-

ject next to an organisation called True Vision raising awareness of hate crime and I couldn’t help but notice the not so indiscreet jangling of donation buckets. One stall that caught my eye in particular belonged to the organisation Spectrum. This umbrella organisation was established in 2002 as a response to the inefficiencies felt by the LGBT community in Brighton, Hove and the surrounding areas as indicated in the Count Me In surveys. I felt this was all rather interesting and picking up an annual report was suddenly envious of the Brighton residents

We soon made it over to the Candybar tent; at last I was at my Mecca. Unfortunately we’d missed the pole dancing however we were just in time for the DJ set and I finally managed to catch up with one of those Gaydar models – whether or not that lipgloss came in handy however I’m not inclined to say.

The great thing about Pride is that there’s something for everyone, young, old, gay, straight, bi, trans, female, male or just plain confused. Although my friends and I missed out on the Singstar stage and the Revenge Cabaret we managed to make it back to the pier before nine to watch the beautifully staged fireworks display just off the coast. As the sky lit up with green, red and dazzling white sparks I spotted a few couples arm in arm, heads arched towards the evening sky. It was then I realised the romance of it all. It had been one of those lovely summer days, crammed with seaside fun and promises fulfilled. I was no longer a Pride Virgin and I was proud.
What do you get when you cross 40 young gay people from across Europe, a lot of very loud music, some outrageous dress senses, and a crowd of about 300,000 people. Eurovision? Or our boat in Amsterdam pride 2006?

We have a weakness for cultural exchanges and trips abroad, so when we got offered one on a plate that combined the promotion of gay rights and LGBT issues then we simply could not refuse the chance to represent the UK at the European LesBi-Gay conference. This years convention was held in Delft in the Netherlands and consisted of 14 nationalities from as far West as Iceland and as far East as Bulgaria, together over 60 participants worked for over 10 days trying to change the face of LGBT issues across all of Europe. Whilst the conference in itself provided us with a lot of fun and inspiration we are in agreement that without a doubt our highlight was being in Amsterdam Pride at the end of the conference.

Unlike all other Pride festivals, Amsterdam Pride is held on the canals and takes place on canal boats. The conference organisers had been benevolent enough to arrange for a boat of our very own to take part in the 3-hour parade through the canals of Amsterdam. Being Pride virgins we had also harboured quite conservative views on such events and both felt that sexuality was something personal and private to an individual, so the whole idea of waving rainbow flags whilst generally being quite raucous in public seemed to go against these values. However, we quickly realised that there is nothing more empowering and thrilling than to have over 300,000 people lining the canals of Amsterdam dancing along with you and enjoying a huge party. The party lasted well into the night.

“Amsterdam Gay Pride touched us immensely because everyone came together to celebrate difference”
but the parade itself was something truly phenomenal. The boats ranged everything from thought-provoking, serious to simply outrageous, and as the alcohol and sexual liberation flowed freely so did the day became even more fantastic.

However, whilst the picture that may be painted was one of utter debauchery and wildness, there was a very touching side to the day. There were not just gay men and lesbians out in force, but often whole families making a day of the festivities, children dancing with their parents, old ladies out having picnics on their house boats waving as the boats went past. This is what a Pride festival and indeed gay activism should be all about, inclusivity. Gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people do not want to marginalise themselves and draw attention at every conceivable moment, we wish only to be included and given exactly the same rights as heterosexual people do. Amsterdam Gay Pride touched us immensely because everyone came to-
gether to celebrate difference, not just based upon sexual orientation, but to celebrate the diversity and tolerance of society as a whole. And it’s right to celebrate this. If our society is void of diversity and tolerance then what hope do we have as a civilization?

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http://www.amsterdamgaypride.nl
http://www.amsterdampride.nl/
www.coc.nl

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**Pride Facts**

- The first gay pride parade in 1969, known as the March on Stonewall, started as a protest against discrimination and violence against gays in New York City.

- The gay pride flag, which was debuted at the 1978 San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Freedom Day Parade, was designed by Gilbert Baker. It’s inspiration came from the black civil rights and hippie movements.

- Adding a black stripe to the bottom of the flag represents solidarity against AIDS.

- The **gay pride** campaign of the gay rights movement has three main premises: that people should be proud of their sexual orientation and gender identity, that sexual diversity is a gift, and that sexual orientation and gender identity are inherent and cannot be intentionally altered.
I’d like to thank all those people who sent poems into [no definition] this term. I was so impressed with them all that I decided to dedicate the back pages as a special poetry section.

**Little Black Hearts**

Sometimes I cry
And play the Stones
And cry again.
I’m not sure why.
Sometimes I draw little black hearts
Or people smiling or crying or laughing.
I’m not sure why.
Maybe I am human
That doesn’t mean I’m prepared to accept it.
I cry about that, too.

Sometimes I cry
And I know exactly why,
But I still drink you into oblivion.
Every time.
Why don’t you rot, and stay out of my dreams?
Then I’d save on sanity, alcohol,
And tissues.

Porsha

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**By Candlelight**

That first time
Our first time
You composed with them a heart
Bearing our initials
- Out into the night

They lit the way
And you found me
Every secret, every sigh
And under their watchful eye
- Took everything

They burned down
While we slept
And I held you
While your eyes sought out the stars
- Never rested

In the morning
You collected them up
One by one
And put them back in the box
- To be reused

Sophie Horner

---

**She Looked Back**

You smelled too much like summer, too much
Of the sweet and sharp perfumes,
The tea tree hand cream, citrus blooms.
You tasted like the city, dripped in urban sweat and
Ran dirty nails through your salty hair,
And blinked at me with your eyelids wet-
You crystallised against the light,
You slipped from solvent, long dissolved into
The grey street backwash, dripping out you shone;
Refracted, gleamed, and gone.
The seconds muted as I checked; your shadow
Lengthened, stretched into the wilderness of feet and
Wheels, I waited, wasted all my daydreams
As you glanced through sulphur smog at me.

Georgina Milne

---

**Too Weak to be an Angel**

i see her smile
like second sight
etched into my eyelids
hailing from the half-light
perfect in the half-light
she is my resting state

she runs tangents
to my empty apathy
she knows my shadows as she knows her hands
she knows me best
because i let her
because her smile sounds my name

yet i know that when she’s dreaming
she’s singing with her eyes closed
and she’s leaving me
mere mortal
to voids and all that’s in between
to dreams more tangible than truth
to each my savoured half
every severed kiss

touching my lips
smiling back
smiling through the half-light

Sophie Horner

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**Creative Writing Corner - Poetry special**
**Hatesong**

You're a bitch
And I hate you.
Look at you there
All eyes
And lips
And seduction.
You're a bitch
And I hate you.

Walk into my life
Walk out once again;
You never call to say
You'll be over, on your way.
You just show your fucking face
And I fall
Again.
And I fall.

Fall.
Lies like pillows
Embrace me like mother
She fucking hates you too.
Because your a bitch.

Reach out claw-hand
Scratch out eye-pit
Scream out bitch-name
Spit out bile-gut

You're a bitch
And I hate you.
No more than you deserve.
Look at my life.
Look at what you did.
Look who I am.
Look what you do.

What does it take?
Make you see, make you look.
Open those mascara lashes
See the marks you leave.
Kiss the pain away
Tongue wash shame burn rashes.

If I could kill you now
Freedom in blood-bound blows;
If I could kill you now
I'd loathe you to death.
But love you back to life again.
Because you're a bitch
And I hate you.

Look at my life.
Look at what you did.
Skeleton-bare, stripped I stand
Every caress a torture.
I want to kill
I want to kiss
Bitter is sweet in lip-thrust motions
You degraded fucker.
Don't you know any better?

You're a bitch
And I hate you.
But you're only glass
You're only silver
And when I don't look
You return to your inner place.
But you'll always be a bitch
And I'll always hate you.
But fuck knows, I need you.
Now.

Porsha

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**Susan**

Pale faced, wider than the moon
And sweat slicked;
Hollow,
Always seeming
Empty underneath your age of flesh and
Fingers, creamy meat, a voice, a pulse and not a single
Word to scream,
Just like granite breathing,
Darling, I was lost-
Always grey, a fog shawl on your skin,
I pressed my fingers through
And felt my thumbprints crumble off-
I saw my knuckles jarring in my fingers,
While they wandered reckless over you.

Georgina Milne

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If you feel you have what it takes to write for [no definition] then we want to hear from you.

Articles, reviews, letters, satire…

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No鬧翻天