

Rainbow SIG Newsletter

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These articles appeared in the Fall 1999 edition of Lesbigan SIGnals.

- Alternative Lifestyles Foundation of Nigeria (ALFON): Nigerians Organize and Vocalize
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- **Alternative Lifestyles Foundation of Nigeria (ALFON): Nigerians Organize and Vocalize**

- *By Joe Murnan, Co-Chair, Lesbigan SIG*
- Under the fear of imprisonment and legal persecution, gays and lesbians in Nigeria have been prevented from seeking equality. With the installation of a civilian government this past spring, gay and lesbian activists have formed ALFON to push for recognition and equality for gays and lesbians. ALFON's mission is to organize gays and lesbians into a formidable pressure group; to engage in activities that would enhance, promote, protect, advance the interest and integrity of its members; to expand membership to include the continent of Africa; and to break the social taboo associated with being gay or lesbian.
- One of ALFON's founders and also a University of Texas at Arlington graduate, Kene Uz Korie returned to the United States to study gay and lesbian organizations. While he is here he will be meeting with community leaders and studying federal and state laws that pertain to the treatment of gays. During the month of June he traveled to New York City to meet with several larger organizations to learn their missions and how they operate.
- Korie believes that the first step in the fight for recognition and equality of gays and lesbians is to take a public stand in Nigeria. According to Korie, there is a sizable gay and lesbian population in Nigeria. Gays and lesbians have already been waiting for the transition from military dictatorship to civilian rule that will enable them to speak out and voice their opinions. He has met with hundreds of others who all agree that this process will take time.
- Six years ago, Gen. Sani Abacha annulled the results of the presidential elections, seized power and jailed the winner, Moshood Abiola. Abacha controlled Nigeria with military might. According to Korie, "A society of the strictest taboos in the world, Nigeria has represented a living hell for all those seeking to express an alternative persuasion. Life is not easy living under a military dictator, needless to talk of open campaign for gay/lesbian rights. Before now, we are afraid to speak out, marginalized, targets of hate crimes, discriminated against, ridiculed, and treated unfairly in the dispensation of justice and economic resources and much more."
- Both Abacha and his anticipated successor, Abiola, died in June and July of 1998. Abacha's successor, Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar, announced presidential elections and a return to civilian rule by May 1999.

- Even though May 1999 officially marked the return to a democratic government, Korie and fellow activists remain realistic about their aspirations. Homosexuality is still one of Nigeria's biggest taboos, Korie noted. "We don't expect to have a victory over night, but we intend to talk about it, write about it," he said. "And as time goes on we plan to invite public speakers from (America) to come and address us and Nigeria."
- During the first week of June, program coordinator Brent Chuks held ALFON's first public press conference to announce its goals. ALFON's agenda includes setting up a central office in Lagos with a legal resource unit. It also plans to establish an AIDS prevention, awareness and management facility. ALFON plans to establish and publish a special gay/lesbian biweekly magazine. The establishment and operation of Africa's first gay/lesbian radio station is also included in the agenda.
- In his meetings with various gay American organizations Korie is also learning how they operate, while scouting for financial donations and contributions that could assist the Foundation as it begins. To "fully take-off" the Foundation is seeking a minimum of \$500,000 according to the group's chairman.
- The Foundation doesn't expect an overnight victory, but as Korie noted the group is taking the first step to organize. Eventually they would like to be, according to Korie, the umbrella group for the whole of the African continent.
- For more information about ALFON call 214-770-4090 or 001-234-1-266-8559. Korie can be contacted at Kenuezo@netscape.net.

The SIG in Denver: The Best Yet!

By Bo Keppel, Co-Chair, Lesbian SIG

I sincerely hope that your experience in Denver mirrored mine. This was without a doubt the best NAFSA national conference I have attended, and although I am not as senior in NAFSA as some of you (!), I have attended at least four previous to Denver. The reason this was such a successful conference for me was the Lesbian SIG. All the folks whom I have known from past nationals and regionals were there, and so many, many more. Although I was too involved in chairing the SIG meeting to count attendees, we estimated that at least 85 folks were there! And what great support they gave to all that we on the SIG team were trying to achieve. (Please see the [Minutes](#).)

Thanks to Peter Voeller's thoughtful and early search for a B & B that could house as many of the SIG who wished to stay there, I had comfortable and homey accommodations only a mile from the conference site. That mile walk, much of it uphill in the afternoon, guaranteed I would get some exercise during a very busy week. (Any benefits I derive from jogging from one session to the next or running around the exhibition hall seem to be negated by excessive eating and drinking indulged in at receptions!) Five of us stayed at the B & B so most mornings I had company hoofing to

the Convention Center. But best of all, the B & B housed our very first catered SIG reception. Enjoying the cash bar and delicious hot and cold hors d'oeuvres were about fifty members and friends. Peter Voeller had also thoughtfully brought two prizes to be drawn, and one lucky SIG member went home with an elegantly tacky pink jewelry box complete with tutu-ed ballerina turning to that now- nauseating tune, "Feelings"!

On a more serious note, the two sessions and one poster session devoted to SIG issues were well attended. Our own Kathleen Sideli in her role with SECUSSA organized an all-SIG poster session. She, Susan Carty, Peter Johnson and I staffed the table, talked with many friends and members, but also with at least fifteen new people, five of whom completed membership forms. We felt it served as an excellent opportunity to promote the SIG to those in NAFSA who didn't know much about us.

Both a CAFSS and a SECUSSA session were held and both reported excellent attendance and received very positive ratings. The CAFSS session, which Scott King from Old Dominion and I presented, was called "Coming Out: Help and Advice for Any Advisor." Despite its being held at 8 A.M., many of our loyal SIG members arrived to support us, as did a surprising number of new folks. The SECUSSA session was entitled, "Emerging Out of the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' Mentality in Education Abroad," and was chaired by Carol Lebold who, with Cristina Sosa, wrote the proposal. Members of the panel were Teri J. Heimer, Julie Trimpe, J. Scott Van der Meid, and I. Again the attendance was exceptional. Several people at the end of the session suggested doing a workshop on the topic for next year's conference in order to give the topic enough time. Unfortunately, neither Carol nor any of the panel members was able to put together a proposal in time for the August 1 deadline. Perhaps in 2001.

So the conference was a very busy one for me, as I'm sure it was for you. For me however, you and your support for the SIG, your willingness to work, your smiles, good wishes and frequent expressions of appreciation were what made this the best national conference ever. Thank you, thank you!

>Stay in touch. Your Advisory Board needs to hear from you, and the best way to communicate with us is through the Rainbow Listserve. To reach either Joe Murnan, our new co-chair, or me individually, see below for our e-mail addresses. Here's to another great year in international education, sending American students to safe and exciting places and welcoming all the great international students who need us, both straight and GLBT!

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Climate Control?

Note: Chris Mullin reports on current policies and attitudes towards gay people in the UK and asks if it is perhaps more superficial than it may at first seem.

24th May 1988.

Local Government Act 1988.

28 - (1) The following section shall be inserted after section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 (prohibition of political publicity) 2A - 1 A local authority shall not - intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretend family relationship.

I was fifteen, and had just come out. I can't pretend it didn't bother me, but I knew they were wrong. My circumstances were such that there was very little I could do about it. Growing up in a tiny village in the Midlands and still very beholden to my parents, I didn't know who to write to to discuss it with, or, most discouraging of all, the legal age of consent, which at that time was still 21. It didn't stop me though.

What exactly did it stop? The most significant aspect of Clause 28, bar its very existence, is that fact that nobody has ever been prosecuted under it. It is, however, one of those things which is dragged up now and then. At the time, books containing the above subject matter were withdrawn from libraries and a certain amount of self-censorship was installed in schools. Amongst other things, it was my other great passion, the performing arts, which came under heavy scrutiny. It doesn't excuse, but goes some way to explaining, my apathetic attitude towards authority.

The demonstrations that followed the introduction of Clause 28 were huge, and had the effect of promoting homosexuality in a way I had certainly never experienced at school. There was, of course, the usual media frenzy, both for and against, but when the press got tired of it, the 'swayable' majority within the nation started talking about other things and it was left for the activists to lobby parliament for a reversal. When it was seen that enforcing the Clause was simply one big grey area, we got the message that it was, if at all, to be used as a control mechanism. The campaigns for an equal age of consent and the abolition of Clause 28 were to go hand in hand from then on.

In 1994, Edwina Curry, formerly Junior Health Secretary for the Conservative Party, went, completely out of the blue, on national TV to start a campaign for lowering the age of consent to 16. People were stunned. The very party which had introduced, amongst other things, the Act of 1988, was going public in supporting, not just gay men, but the LGBT community at large. Suspicions were rampant. Was it an election ploy? (Did they want our votes as well as our souls?) Was it some form of dissent from within? The result of an internal power struggle? Or maybe it was just Edwina researching her latest Romance Novel. Well, OK then Edwina, we'll try it your way. She did it though. With a lot of pressure and a fair bit of advice from lobby groups, she and her bunch of cronies forced the vote. For the first time in several years homo-mania hit the press again, to the extent that if you were unable to be outside the Houses of Parliament on the night of the vote, you could watch it live on TV. The feeling was one of cautious optimism, but then the result was announced. MP's had opted instead for the age of 18. So near, and yet so far. The riot that followed was also televised. (Edited highlights only.)

With the Crime and Disorder Bill of 1998 a new wave of optimism ensued. New government (for the first time in my own political memory), this time Labour was in power. Initiated by Stonewall, the New Clause 1 of the Bill proposed an age of 16 in England, Wales and Scotland, and 17 in Northern Ireland, bringing all parts of the UK in line with heterosexuals. It was passed, only to be turned down a month later by the House of Lords. It had been an issue that had again, been used as a vote winner, only this time it had worked. Tony Blair had been unable to deliver his promise. He had omitted to point out the flaw in this part of his election campaign, and said merely that the Lords overruling would be reversed again when the issue is to be handed to the European Parliament.

It is not insignificant, that living as I did for 6 years as a sexual 'outlaw' and having a complete disregard for the laws of the land in which I lived, I am more perceptive of public opinions than of current political debate. It also allowed me to 'look in' on a society that was not geared towards me. I was not its 'target audience.' That, at least, has changed. Whatever the inequalities of the law, public opinion in the UK towards LGBT peoples is generally sympathetic, indifferent, appraising, admiring, and in some aspects, even commercial. Saturday early evening on BBC1 TV, peak time, it is quite usual now to see Lily Savage, a six foot drag queen from Liverpool hosting the quiz show 'Blankety Blank', followed immediately by Dale Winton, a gay man, camp as you like, hosting another game show in addition to his totally over the top 'Super Market Sweep', a popular morning daily. Not totally representative of our community, I know, but all of the major soaps have leading gay characters, gay theatre, film and TV are popular with all of the community, as are the various forms of nightlife. In the law courts, concessions for gay people are being made that result in Barristers and JP's blatantly disregarding the laws they are meant to be upholding, and many UK companies have changed or are changing policy to allow for same sex and/or unmarried couples. In my previous company, equal opportunities bordered alarmingly on positive discrimination.

Other events generate huge support and understanding. Elton John, playing at the funeral of Princess Diana, will be the 'highlight' that most people will remember. She would not have minded it to be so. The Soho Bomb resulted in the first member of the Royal Family, Prince Charles, to visit a gay bar, clearly commenting on the gay communities' status and contribution to the nation as a whole, echoing general opinions of the moment. It is our achievements, however, rather than the bereavements where we lack recognition. But how do we do this? As 'out' gay people? Or as someone who has achieved something and who 'happens to be gay'. Where lies the stronger message?

There is still a way to go. Clause 28, due for review (again!) this year, still exists in its original format, although the chances of it being overturned this time round are far better. Our current administration has four 'out' MPs, one who sits on the cabinet and another of whom beat Michael Portillo in the last general election. Portillo had been Defense Secretary for the Tories and at one time was immensely popular. It was a victory indeed and prompted even right wing Portillo into admitting he once had a same sex 'experience.' Homophobia is still rampant in some areas of employment, such as

the Stock Exchange and Legal Firms but even in many rural areas of the UK it is now possible to live as a gay man or women. People tolerate, irrespective of whether they truly understand or confront the issues.

I firmly believe that attitudes in the UK have changed for the better over recent years. There are of course far right wing groups still active but the majority of the population does not share their opinions. It is now up to those of us that can to pursue the opportunities now open to us. Not necessarily to 'demand equality', but simply to 'be equal.' We owe it to those who generated the openings and those who lived and still live in less tolerant climates.

Lesbigay SIGnals, Spring 1999

Web of the Future

By J. Scott Van Der Meid and Julie Trimpe

We just wanted to let you know about the project we have been working on since Denver. Both Julie and I are in the process of reorganizing the layout of the Web site and hope to bring you an even greater resource in the coming months.

We are looking to divide the Web site into two different areas. The first area will be for professionals in the field and will contain a large majority of the information which is currently posted on the site. The other area will focus on issues and resources for students. This is the area which needs the most assistance as we are looking for information and materials written for students. A part of this reorganization is to pull all the Web sites, organizations, books, magazines, etc. into one resource listing by country and NAFSA section. If there is any interest in helping to do this, we welcome any helping hands!

We know you have the materials and resources out there, so we will shortly be compiling a list of resources we are looking for in both areas. We hope by identifying the areas of information we seek, that we will be able to add more helpful information to our site and to our SIG. If you have something you would like to contribute now, please contact either one of us. In rainbow spirits,

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