



The OUTbox

An OUTniagara publication

Summer 2007 Edition – June 1, 2007

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OUTniagara's new board steps forward with P.R.I.D.E.

Partnerships, remembrance, information, diversity, empowerment — these are the five core values of OUTniagara, and it is no mistake that the first letters of those five words spell PRIDE. On May 17, 2007, we demonstrated how all have been a part of OUTniagara over the past two years, and for the year to come.

We have developed and enhanced our relationship with our partners through the partners committee and Pride committee. We have even added a new organization as an official partner: The St. Catharines

& District Labour Council's Pride & Solidarity Committee. OUTniagara looks forward to working with this organization and the other partner organizations in the year to come.

After a lengthy discussion at a special general meeting, we now have a mandate to preserve Niagara's queer history. Over the next term, we will be developing our website and engaging other media to ensure that the struggles and successes of the sexual- and gender-diverse community are not forgotten.

Informing our members and the community at large has always been a key activity of OUTniagara. It will continue to be a strong focus going forward. We will continue to offer biweekly events listings, quarterly newsletters (*The OUTbox*), our website, special notices to members, and OUTspoken (a queer radio show on CFBU 103.7 FM). We will also be developing our website to better serve our members, and the community at large, in the coming months. We strive to have a diverse organization — from executive, to the board, to the membership in its entirety. We have members who are male, female, straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and queer. We have members old and members young. We have members from all 12 municipalities in Niagara, and some from outside the region.

The true indicator of our organization's commitment to diversity is evident in composition of our newly elected board of directors:

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Community Links

Visit <http://www.outniagara.ca> and click on "Community" to link up on the internet to the following websites:

Partner Organizations

The Imperial Court of St. Catharines & The Greater Niagara Region

PFLAG St. Catharines

Niagara Pride Support Services, Inc.

Transgender Niagara

CAW Local 199 LGBT Committee

Brock Pride

Team Niagara

TransParent Canada

AIDS Niagara

The St. Catharines & District Labour Council's Pride & Solidarity Committee

External Partner Organizations

Gay West

Other Organizations

The Unitarian Congregation of Niagara

EDITORIAL

We've Come a Long Way But the Journey is Not Over Yet

By Kevin Jacobi

As the saying goes, you do not know a man until you have walked a mile in his shoes. Being gay, I realize that the proper shoes are a must for any outfit and that a person's choice in footwear can tell you a lot about them. However, I think that we fall into an ego trap if we believe that we can truly understand how anyone else views the world. What I understand as common sense may be totally alien to you and what you assume to be the "norm" may have me scratching my head. I think that is why I like talking about films and other forms of art. I know what I like and what I relate to. The thrill for me is hearing what my friends have to say about a piece of art that grounds me in understanding how different we all are.

Last February I was privileged to attend Ridley's student production of the Laramie Project. The Laramie Project is a play by Moisés Kaufman and members of the Tectonic Theater Project about the reaction to the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyo., at the hands of two local men. Matthew Shepard was gay and it is believed he was targeted because of this. When I first was told about this production, I was surprised to hear that Ridley would allow their students to tackle such a strong subject as hate crimes against homosexuals. I always perceived the institution as a bastion of right-wing conservative ideals that does not allow for progressive views or expressions.

"I decided it is better to scream ...
Silence is the real crime against humanity."

-- Nadezhda Mandelstam (1899-1980),
Hope Against Hope (1970)

I guess I was wrong.

It was obvious from the production that the director and

his students took the time to workshop this play and explore the destructive behavior that we propagate when we decide not to speak out or act against hate crimes in our community. When it comes to these types of crimes, silence is as good as support and knowledge without action burdens us all with guilt. The

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Mark your calendars for Pride 2007 events in Niagara!



Niagara's third official Pride festival will be bigger and better than ever in 2007. This year's Pride festival has been expanded to include events during the entire month, complementing events held in other communities without interfering with them.

Several "firsts" are taking place at this year's festival, which celebrates the LGBTQ community and raises its profile to the broader community. The raising of the rainbow flag on June 5 at Niagara Falls City Hall will be a historic first for that city. In addition, two film nights led by Kevin Jacobi will also be a first-time offering designed to enhance the traditional events of the dance,

solstice service and Pride brunch.

A committee of OUTniagara partners and several interested individuals has been working to make sure this is our best festival ever. We hope to continue to expand the number and diversity of events over the next few years and to hold the festival events in other Niagara municipalities.

If you have any questions or comments about this year's Pride festival, please e-mail Pride co-chairs Ed Eldred and Gal Grenville at pride2007@outniagara.ca

Following is the list of 2007 Pride events:

Friday, June 1, at 12 noon

St. Catharines Pride Flag Raising Ceremony

Once again, St. Catharines is recognizing its strong LGTBQ community by hosting a flag raising ceremony on the steps of city hall. A city councillor will raise the flag after a few words from both himself and members of the community.

Saturday, June 2, at 10 p.m.

Show Your Pride Show

Though we don't have a community centre, we are very lucky to have a local bar like the New Vouz who opens its doors and offers local groups a place to hold meetings and put on fundraising events. So come out and show your Pride as Chrissy Snow and some of the most talented performers in Niagara kick off Pride month with a bang! Everyone is welcome to perform. The New Vouz is located at 151 Queenston St. in St. Catharines.



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Sunday, June 3, at 12 noon
OUT for Lunch – Pride Edition

Join all of your closest friends at Vecera Restaurant in the Holiday Inn on Lake St. at the QEW in St. Catharines for our monthly brunch event. With a great buffet, and lots of conversation, this is a great way to kick off your week. Everyone is welcome regardless of age or sex – So come on OUT and make this the biggest Pride Brunch ever!

Tuesday, June 5, 10 a.m.
Flag-raising Ceremony in Niagara Falls

In a historic first, the rainbow flag will be raised at Niagara Falls City Hall. Mayor Ted Salci will be in attendance.

Friday, June 8, 8 p.m. to 1 a.m.
Niagara's Third Annual Pride Dance

As per the mandate of OUTNiagara, we are committed to holding events across the Niagara Region to promote LGTBQ issues and celebrate our community. What better way to reach out to Welland than to hold our biggest dance of the year at Club Social located on East Main Street in Welland? With great music and all your friends, this will be a fabulous time! Tickets are \$5 in advance, \$7 at the door, with proceeds going to help community development in Niagara.

Sunday, June 10, 12 noon
Annual Niagara Pride Picnic

Once again, the Niagara Pride Support Services will host the annual Pride picnic at Burgoyne Woods in St. Catharines. This is a family event with games for the kids, and those who act like kids, as well as a dog show and lots of food to enjoy. It's a great time to relax and socialize.

Wednesday, June 13, 7 to 10 p.m.
LGTBQ Film Club – Boys Night OUT

Join Kevin Jacobi as he screens films that will entertain you and provoke discussion about various aspects of the LGTB community. Tonight's focus will be on gay men in movies. Doors open at 7 p.m. with the films starting at 7:30 p.m. The screenings will be finished around 9:30 p.m. with a group-led discussion of the film to follow. Everyone is welcome to share this part of LGTB film history. The Film Club takes place at the New Vouz located at 151 Queenston St. in St. Catharines.

Thursday, June 21, 7 p.m.
Summer Solstice Event

Come and celebrate the arrival of summer with our second summer solstice event. Held at Lakeside Park in Port Dalhousie, this event combines music with multifaith readings.



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Wednesday, June 27, 7 to 10 p.m.

LGTBQ Film Club – Girls Night OUT

Join Kevin Jacobi as he screens films that will entertain you and provoke discussion about various aspects of the

LGTB community. Tonight's focus will be on gay women in movies. Doors open at 7 p.m. with the films starting at 7:30. The screenings will be finished around 9:30 with a group-led discussion of the film to follow. Everyone is welcome to share this part of LGTB film history. The Film Club takes place at the New Vouz located at 151 Queenston Street in St. Catharines.

Two Niagara teens inspired by OutRight conference

By Nicole Etherington

In April, Courtney Pitre, project director, GLBTQ Youth Outreach Project, and teenagers Nicole Etherington and Johnathan Sawick, travelled to Calgary, Alta. for the North American Outgames and OutRights Conference. Organizations, family and friends contributed \$1,455 in a month-long fundraising effort.

Our flight was scheduled to depart at 7:20 a.m. on Sunday, April 1. Though comatose from our early wake-up call, I was anxious and filled with excitement. I wasn't quite sure what to expect in Calgary, but somewhere amidst my fear of flying and desire to sleep was a feeling that we would find something special in the heart of western Canada. Johnathan, Courtney, and I exuded enthusiasm (and exhaustion – I'll put it this way, Courtney does *not* pack light) as we boarded the WestJet plane to Calgary. We were passionate about bringing a valuable commodity back to Niagara. As we landed in the Stampede City four hours later, we only hoped we could discover what we came to find.

We spent our first day in Calgary exploring our hotel, familiarizing ourselves with the labyrinthine Calgary transit system, and attempting what sightseeing we could in the freezing weather. The quiet downtown area surrounding the hotel was surreal, and between joking with Courtney and John about how strange this city seemed, I'll admit that I started to wonder what exactly I was doing there. The answer, however, was just about to reveal itself.

The OutRights Conference that we had flown to Calgary to attend was held over April 2 and April 3. Part of the first-ever North American OutGames, the conference featured a combination of workshops and keynote speakers addressing the human rights issues facing the GLBT community. It brought together a diverse audience that included activists, students, politicians, members of the GLBT community and their allies, and provided an incredible opportunity to share information and create action. Ultimately, the conference was a catapult for creating social change – a theme established from the very beginning.

The opening session featured speaker R. Douglas Elliot, a lawyer from Toronto best known for his work on

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National PFLAG award raises profile of trans families

In tremendous public recognition of trans persons and their families, PFLAG Canada presented Joan Wiley of TransParent Canada with one of its 2007 National Champion Against Homophobia awards. The inaugural award was presented to three Canadian individuals/organizations.

“This award is for all of the parents who are on this journey with their trans children,” said Wiley. “I am only one voice. I especially want to express my gratitude to the St. Catharines chapter of PFLAG Canada for having the wisdom, the vision and the compassion to endorse the organization and move it forward.”



TransParent Canada, formed in 2005, is an associate member of the St. Catharines chapter of PFLAG Canada and a partner of OUTniagara.

In its newsletter, PFLAG Canada said “champions inspire us to celebrate difference. They demonstrate courage, compassion, and personal integrity in dealing with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. And though they may not always have a wealth of information to share, their actions speak loud and clear in support of a more open and accepting Canadian society.”

Tyler Christiansen, a young man from rural Ontario who began a Gay-Straight Alliance in his high school despite being ousted from the family home, also received the award, as did the Capital Health Initiative from Halifax, N.S. The PFLAG newsletter profiling the three recipients can be found at <http://www.pflagcanada.ca/newsletter/en/connections0703.pdf>

Other TransParent Canada events:

- *One of two guest lecturers in a Brock University Canadian History class studying Queer Nation;*
- *A panel participant at Brock University’s Niagara Social Justice Forum in an April workshop devoted entirely to trans issues;*
- *Featured in the Spring 2007 national newsletter of the Canadian Unitarian Council. The story can be found on Page 13 at http://www.cuc.ca/canu/spring07_web.pdf*



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Editor's note: This was spotted on the Internet — please substitute America with any number of other countries as desired.



The Top 10 reasons why gay marriage will destroy American society

10. Being gay is not natural. Real Americans always reject unnatural things like eyeglasses, polyester, and air conditioning.
9. Gay marriage will encourage people to be gay, in the same way that hanging around tall people will make you tall.
8. Legalizing gay marriage will open the door to all kinds of crazy behaviour. People may even wish to marry their pets because a dog has legal standing and can sign a marriage contract.
7. Straight marriage has been around long time and hasn't changed at all; women are still property, blacks still can't marry whites, and divorce is still illegal.
6. Straight marriage will be less meaningful if gay marriage were allowed; the sanctity of Britney Spears' 55-hour just-for-fun marriage would be destroyed.
5. Straight marriages are valid because they produce children. Gay couples, infertile couples, and old people shouldn't be allowed to marry because our orphanages aren't full yet, and the world needs more children.
4. Obviously gay parents will raise gay children, since straight parents only raise straight children.
3. Gay marriage is not supported by religion. In a theocracy like ours, the values of one religion are imposed on the entire country. That's why we have only one religion in America.
2. Children can never succeed without a male and a female role model at home. That's why we as a society expressly forbid single parents to raise children.
1. Gay marriage will change the foundation of society; we could never adapt to new social norms. Just like we haven't adapted to cars, the service-sector economy, or longer life spans.



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CAW Pride Conference 2007: Preventing activist burnout

By Brian Delaney,
CAW 199 LGBT/NPSS/TGN/SCDLC Pride &Solidarity

Day 1:

CAW LGBT Members, Allies and Leadership attended a conference in Port Elgin at the CAW education centre to talk about LGBT issues, build strategies to cope with “activist burnout” and other challenges in addition to getting our leadership and allies to support us in our workplaces and communities.

“Creating Safer Workplaces” was the theme of this conference, which can only be accomplished with leadership’s support. After being welcomed to the CAW Pride Conference for 2007, there were a number of speakers, including Carol Phillips’ (assistant to CAW President Buzz Hargrove), who spoke about “Manufacturing Crisis”.

Carol told delegates the current crisis is not the result of a temporary economic downturn or cycle and that Canada is losing 150 manufacturing jobs every day and that rate is accelerating.

After the speakers were done we had a wonderful surprise — a great big wedding cake, with two men together and two women together, was served to delegates! Champagne/ginger ale was served to all of the delegates along with cake to celebrate our Equal Marriage (because it is) Victory!

Day2:

This conference was different than past ones. The strategy of having CAW Leadership in workshops separate from LGBT workers was brilliant. It was felt that LGBT workers needed our own space to talk about our own issues and that CAW Leadership would learn and open up more if separated; they wouldn’t have to worry about asking dumb questions or saying the wrong thing!

The workshops really were very helpful and some great ideas for “LGBT workers/activists” and for “Leadership/Allies” came out of these workshops.

Our CAW Local 199 Leadership suggested having Leadership and management (not LGBT activists) hand out these wonderful “Allies Booklets” in our workplaces and it was passed to do just that by our CAW Local 199 Executive when we came home. Sue Carter (Education department.) and Lisa Kelly (Legal department) and others from the CAW National put together the conference and also made that wonderful booklet entitled





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“Allies-Everything you wanted to know about LGBT people, well maybe not everything”! The work that they’ve done is incredible, especially when we consider the fact that they do all of this LGBT work in addition to their full-time jobs. WOW! Talk about burnout, they should know!

Some of the coping strategies we came up with were simple but very helpful. Lisa Kelly noted that we should focus on our successes and not our failures. The delegates talked of forming a support network so individuals could talk to other LGBT activists/allies when they needed help. I noted how just writing e-mails or talking to people was the best support for me; I e-mailed Sue about burnout etc., and Sue Carter listened to my concerns and helped me to see the glass as half full and not half empty.

A really wonderful big resource book was given to all delegates as well.

Other Queer activists started an e-mail/contact list for networking and sharing ideas and supporting each other. Many thanks to the discussion leaders for bringing us together and delivering very helpful workshops!

Day 3

As a panelist on Sunday morning, I talked about CAW activism and why I get involved in the events that I do; from supporting community groups to Local union struggles, LGBT and non-LGBT specific events. I gave examples from some of the OUTniagara partner groups and also my CAW Local 199 leadership on the importance of our CAW 199 LGBT Committee involvement.



We can see the importance of bringing our union to the community and working together with community groups and we also see the importance of bringing LGBT issues to the union. We are creating safer more inclusive workplaces and communities by bringing our Pride flags and our LGBT activism to union and community events.

As an LGBT activist, one of my main goals is to end discrimination in general and in particular to end LGBT phobias. It occurred to me that all of the activism work that LGBT people have been doing around all of our unions issues (picket line support, minimum wage, injured workers, ending violence against women, discrimination,

harassment, manufacturing crisis campaign, and so on) has had the affect of erasing the barriers of discrimination/LGBT phobia.



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There was also another really wonderful thing that happened at the conference that can be directly related to the great job OUTniagara and the partner groups have been doing.

As a panelist on Sunday morning, I talked about OUTniagara and the partner groups and because of this, one man asked me if I was part of TransParent (I'm not) because he has a trans child and is looking for support. I've talked to Joan Wiley from TransParent and she has now contacted the East Coast family to provide support. This is amazing and OUTniagara and the partner groups should be incredibly happy that we made this possible. If I had never gone to the CAW Education centre in Port Elgin in 2001, I may have never met Irene Konik and Tom Balint of our CAW 199 LGBT committee and I may have never been involved with OUTniagara and its partners. So because of all of this, I was a Sunday morning panelist and I was able to get TransParent's information, via Joan Wiley, to this CAW brother. My hat's off to OUTniagara and partners! Congratulations to the CAW. It was a really good conference and I thank my union for being so progressive and supportive around LGBT issues at work and in our communities!

Editor's note: The following column is the second in a three-part series of opinion columns by Christine Martin about spirituality and Pride from a Christian perspective. The third part will focus on trans, intersex and two-spirit identities. Christine expanded on these topics in a sermon she delivered to the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara in St. Catharines on May 27.



Opening Doors of Ancient 'Closets': A GLBTI Spiritual Perspective

By Christine Martin

(Part 2 — Lesbian)

A characteristic of many lesbian relationships today is a passionate, committed relationship between two women. The story of Ruth and Naomi in the Bible's Book of Ruth also demonstrates this commitment. This romantic account contains the most moving promise of relationship fidelity between two persons in all of the Bible, and they were both women.

Ruth 1:16 says, "Don't ask me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go. And where you sleep, I will sleep. Your people will be my people, and your God, my God." This is a vow between two women. Were Ruth and Naomi lesbians? It is believed that they were, but no one knows for sure. However, one thing is clear. These two women had a lifelong, passionate, committed relationship, the way many lesbians do today.



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Teacher's transfer just a reminder ...

By Martha Hunt

My partner Rachel and I travelled to Wisconsin in April and had the opportunity to look through a local newspaper. Sort of wish we hadn't. Here is a summary of an article we found, dated Friday, April 27, 2007:

WOODBURN, Ind. (AP) – A high school teacher who faced losing her job after a school newspaper published an editorial advocating tolerance of gays can continue teaching at another school.

Amy Sorrell, 30, reached an agreement that allows her to be transferred to another high school to teach English, said her attorney.

Sorell, who had been an English and Journalism instructor at Woodlan Junior-Senior High School, was placed on paid leave March 19, two months after an editorial advocating tolerance for homosexuals ran in Woodlan's student newspaper.

School officials said that Sorrell did not comply with an agreement to alert the principal about controversial articles.

Sorrell said she is "very proud" of Megan Chase, the student who wrote the editorial calling for tolerance and acceptance of gays. But she said that she could not financially afford to fight the school district over her discipline.

So, just a reminder:

- That there are places in the western world where the call for tolerance for gays is considered controversial.
- That there are school officials in Indiana who do not understand the meaning of 'editorial'.
- That the "land of the free" isn't.
- That in Indiana, the call for understanding can result in legal action.
- That American teachers who encourage their students to think for themselves, are just fortunate to keep their jobs.
-

How do we find the Amy Sorrells of the world to lend them our virtual support and appreciation?



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Out of the closet, into the locker

By Rachel Corbett

The editors of the *OUTbox* have graciously invited me to submit a column – consider me the *OUTbox*'s first official sports correspondent! As the sports world is often described as one of the last bastions of homophobia, I think I will have lots to write about.

I should disclose my bias to readers up front – my work and experience in sport is exclusively in the amateur and commercial realm, not the professional ranks. In my view, pro sport such as is played in the four major leagues (MLB, NHL, NBA, NFL), is not really sport, it's entertainment. My knowledge about it is what I glean from the sports pages and from sitting in front of the television set. In any event, there are so few 'out' athletes in professional sport that there is not much of a story to tell. Or is there?



I was pleasantly surprised this winter when retired British-born NBA player John Amaechi came out and much of the media writing about it was positive and respectful. Amaechi is the first NBA basketball player ever to disclose his homosexuality. I was particularly pleased when NBA Commissioner David Stern severed all associations with homophobic Tim Hardaway, also a retired player, who had been scheduled to make a number of public appearances for the League during the NBA All-Star week. Amaechi himself said: "I underestimated America. I braced myself for the wrath of a nation under God. I imagined that it [coming out] would be a firestorm, that it would be some insane number of letters demanding my deportation or my death ... In fact, 95 percent of the correspondence [has] been overwhelmingly supportive and positive." He also mentioned that the other five percent was "unbelievably, viscerally, frighteningly negative."

So back to what I know. As a partner in the Centre for Sport and Law, a small consulting firm offering legal and quasi-legal services to the amateur and elite sports community, I work full-time in the Canadian sports scene and have done so for nearly 20 years. In the last few years I have been fortunate to be able to combine my professional interest in sport with my personal interest in LGBT advocacy. I thought that in this and subsequent issues of the *OUTbox*, I would share with readers my personal experiences doing that, as well as present some new developments on the national and international sports scene that bode well for the future of gays and lesbians in sports.

In late 2003 I began doing work with the First World Outgames in Montreal, an event that took place in the

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POETRY

Editor's note: "Late Arrival" reflects poet Michel Anthony Lukacsy's personal experience with coming out.

Late Arrival

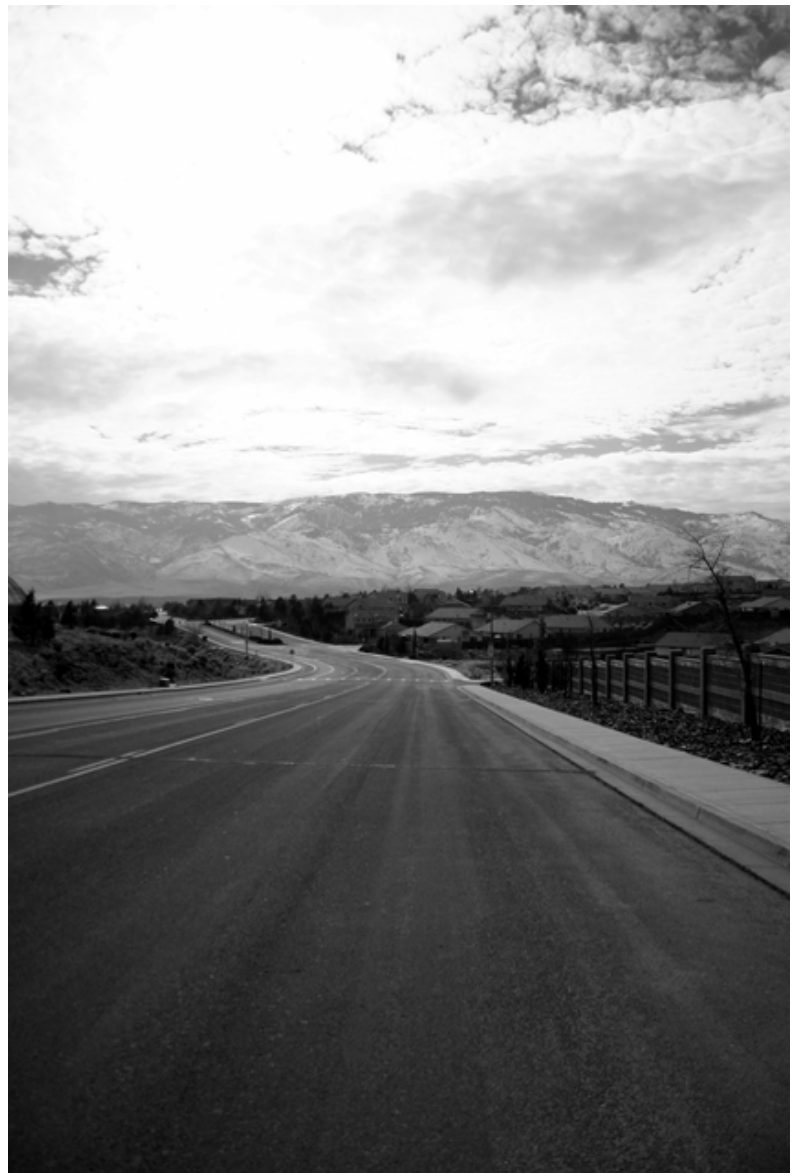
The hour had struck
The time had come

For so many years
I had driven past
On the dark and lonely road
Blindly grappling
Through bluish light
Cast by vast yellow plains
Gazed upon by the graying moon

But it was time to stop

Silently, I creaked the door open
Slowly placed one foot
Then the other
Felt the warm, ivory sand
And began to walk
Pace hastening with every step
Spread my limbs and opened my eyes
And suddenly
Felt the coolness of the tide
Encircle my body
And let myself rise completely
Heart pounding with elation
Into the azure splendour
Of the crashing waves
And into life itself

— Michel Anthony Lukacsy





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Brian Scriver was elected to the position of chair after having served as vice-chair and then chair of OUTniagara. He is young, gay, and a banker by trade. Brian lives in St. Catharines, and works in Niagara Falls.

Vice-chair **Hilary Findlay** is a lawyer and associate professor. Hilary is a lesbian and is currently enjoying her life with her wife in St. Catharines.

Martha Hunt has been re-elected to the position of secretary for her second term. She is a secondary school teacher and has three children. Martha has been an active member of the sexual- and gender-diverse community for years. She lives and works in St. Catharines.

After serving as director, and then as vice-chair, **Kevin Jacobi** will be serving the next two years as treasurer. He is the general manager for a co-packing company in St. Catharines. He is also the chair of the Imperial Sovereign Court of St. Catharines and the Greater Niagara Region.

The remainder of the board is also very diverse. Director **Nick Mehta** is new to OUTniagara. He brings to the board great experience in fundraising and management and he is the public relations manager at a local resort.

Debbie Belliveau has been re-elected after a short appointment as director. She brings many years of experience in the sexual- and gender-diverse community and in fundraising. She has always been a great help at events as a volunteer, and now as a director.

Troy Brooks is also a new face around the board table. Troy, the Academic Integrity Officer at Brock University, brings many experiences from his previous endeavours, including the Niagara Training and Adjustment Board and as the ombudsperson for the Brock University Students' Union.

Welland realtor **Carrie Lee** also brings a professional view to the board. She has served on a number of boards in the past and is looking to become more involved in Niagara's queer community.

Dan Oakes and **Gail Grenville** continue in their roles as directors on the board. Both bring significant experience. Elected in 2006, their terms end in 2008.

This is the composition of our new board of directors elected at the annual general meeting. The membership has empowered the board to carry out the day-to-day business of the organization. In turn, we will empower our members, volunteers and partners to carry out the mission of OUTniagara:

- To celebrate, inform, support and collaborate with the sexual- and gender-diverse community of Niagara;
- To contribute to the success of the partner organizations of OUTniagara; and
- To preserve Niagara's queer history.



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This is a very exciting time for OUTniagara. I am honoured to be part of the great things that are happening in Niagara's sexual- and-gender diverse community. For updates and how to get involved, please see the OUTniagara website at www.outniagara.ca.

Yours with pride,

Brian Scriver
Chair, Board of Directors

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students attacked each role with passion, often switching characters in a Brechtian fashion by simply adding or removing a piece of clothing. Any faults you could find with the acting ability of the students were easily overcome based on depth that they had to reach to make each character come alive.

After this particular performance, the audience was asked to stay for a Q&A with the cast and members of the GLTBQ community of Niagara. Representing "our team" was Joan Wiley from PFLAG/TransParent and Courtney Pitre from Niagara Pride Support Services. Though I was a little disappointed at the exclusion of any gay men on this panel, both Joan and Courtney handled themselves very well. There was an openness that developed between the students and the audience where stories and thoughts were shared. We learned that the most common question from other classmates to the cast was "who was playing the gay guy" and "why do you want to be in a gay play". One of the students shared with the audience that she is bisexual and what challenges there were in dealing with other students. This conversation gave me hope that we are finally creating a world in which we are judged by who we are rather than who we fall in love with. These young adults are not threatened by diversity and seem to accept people for who they are.

Of course, this bubble of a world filled with butterflies and rainbows had to be burst by the last student to speak. As the Q&A progressed, one girl seemed to grow more and more agitated by the conversation. Finally, she spoke up. With tears running down her cheeks, she said that Matthew Shepard wasn't the only victim portrayed in this play but rather the two men who brutally beat him and left him for dead in the wilderness also had their lives ruined. She finished by saying that at least Matthew Shepard was dead but the other men had their lives taken away from them as they spend time in prison because they made a mistake.

No one said a word. There were mumblings from the crowd but before anyone could say anything, the Q&A was ended.

How could this girl see these men who brutalized and left Matthew for dead as victims? From her words, I perceived an implication of Matthew "asking for it" because he was openly gay. Maybe it wasn't the brightest idea for Matthew to go off with these men but the question is whether that lack in judgment is punishable by a slow and tortuous death. I believe that we imprint ourselves on the art that we experience and that it is the



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synthesis of our history along with that of the art that makes it so subjective. This girl seems to have issues with openly gay people. How else can we explain her “reading” of the events depicted in the play?

I learned a lot that night about our community. I learned that kids today are growing up in a world that is more open to diversity. I learned that all the activism and hard work by people to open conversations with individuals of varied backgrounds is making a difference. However, the hardest lesson I learned is that there is still more work to be done because some groups in society still see being gay as wrong. We will never be able to stop hate crimes from being committed but we can make sure that those who perpetrate them are punished to the full

extent of the law. Speak out when you feel something is wrong. Act for those who may not be capable of acting for themselves. This may not help the Matthew Shepards of the world but at least it gives purpose to the loss of a life.

Responses to this editorial or any part of the newsletter are welcome at theoutbox@outniagara.ca

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high profile cases involving social justice issues. With his sharp humour and vast experience, Elliot ignited the capacity for leadership in each and every person in the room. It was clear why we had come to Calgary. While progress had been made in the development of GLBT rights, there was still a long way to go. As young people, it was our responsibility to continue the movement for change, and we headed into the workshops scheduled for the day inspired to become the leaders of tomorrow.

We attended a variety of workshops that covered a range of topics from the areas of social change, essential rights, inclusion within, and health. Most memorable was a workshop featuring “Queer Jeopardy,” which delivered invaluable information in a dynamic way. At the end of Day 1, I felt confident that we were participating in an event that would forever change who we were and what we would become.

That evening, we discussed the highlights of the first half of the conference and anticipated the day to come. The conference was off to a promising start, and upon looking outside, we could see that the dormant Calgary of the previous day had now come to life. Courtney and I decided to take the C-Train to the Saddledome in pursuit of Calgary Flames tickets, while Johnathan decided that his stop would be the Chinook Centre. If I’ve learned anything, it’s that there is no getting a gay man to a hockey game when there’s a shopping mall on the way. Much to our dismay, Courtney and I had no luck finding tickets, but John found a dazzling polo shirt at American Eagle. Back at the hotel, we relaxed and expressed our excitement for the next day. Judy Shepard was set to speak at the opening session on the final day of the conference.

The morning of April 3 was undoubtedly the most gratifying and inspirational experience I have ever known in my 17 years. Judy Shepard began with reading her victim impact statement then took the audience through her journey before and after her son Matthew’s death. As this petite and soft-spoken woman told the story of Matthew Shepard, many were moved to tears. It became apparent to me then just how important it was to have conferences like this. Hatred is a reality that we can only eliminate by working together, triumphing over times of despair, and showing that we are resilient. Judy Shepard closed with the words, “You are who you are, you love who you love,” and I knew from that moment that I would never again feel ashamed of who I was. An



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overwhelming sense of unity and strength became increasingly present as the day went on, and we were grateful to be part of it.

After Judy Shepard's session, John and I participated in a Youth Roundtable Discussion. The forum opened our eyes to many issues involving the GLBT community, and also allowed us to make meaningful connections with others in attendance. We met a young man from Nicaragua, Alvaro Orozco, who is fighting to stay in Canada. John and I were incredibly touched after hearing his story and offered him our greatest support. Our last workshop, entitled "Shine On – You Crazy Diamonds," was equally inspiring. We learned about ordinary people who had made a difference in their communities, and we learned about initiatives we could take to do the same. It was extremely empowering, and left a lasting impression on both of us.

That last day of the conference was an emotional experience. The speakers and workshops that we attended caused Johnathan and I to reflect a lot upon our own lives, and we explored many facets of ourselves that we had previously kept undiscovered. Beyond useful information, contacts, and ideas to make a difference, we

gained courage, inspiration, and strength. Needless to say, we found that something special that we had come to Calgary for. We found *ourselves*. Albeit, it's not Flames tickets... but I'm a Leafs fan anyway.

... *Continued from page 12*

summer of 2006. This exposed me to a totally different experience of sport and enabled me to apply my tools

and skills from the mainstream sector to the nascent, thriving, increasingly commercial and shockingly political world of LGBT sport.

So what has been going on in the straight world of sport in Canada? In 2005 the Government of Canada, through its funding branch Sport Canada, funded the development of a position paper on homophobia in sport. *Seeing the Invisible, Speaking About the Unspoken* was published by the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity in 2005. I was privileged to be the author of this document. Phase 2 of this project is now underway, and involves training facilitators and developing a workshop that will be offered in the sport community around the country. The paper plays an educational role but also sets out practical things that individuals, clubs, schools and sport organizations can do to make the sport environment and the sport experience safer and more welcoming for all participants.



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While the position paper is somewhat distinct (the Women's Sports Foundation in the United States prepared an advocacy document some years ago), in 2006 Canada did something in sport that no country has ever done. Building on the momentum of the position paper and the strategic positioning of some lesbian leaders in sport and valuable straight allies, the Canadian team competing at the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, Australia in March 2006 was designated by Commonwealth Games Canada as a 'positive space'. Building on our experiences in university environments, this meant that the space occupied by the team in the athletes' village had signage to indicate LGBT people were welcome, and staff with the team could choose to wear positive space buttons (many did). As well, all mission staff were provided with training sessions on homophobia in sport. The *Athletes Handbook* for the Canadian team included a section documenting places of interest for LGBT members of the team in Melbourne, and Canadian staff also met with Melbourne police and Commonwealth Games security personnel before the Games to explain this initiative and to be better informed on safety and security issues at the sports venues and in the city of Melbourne.



The success of this small but symbolic project has sustained momentum and I am working closely with a number of other LGBT leaders and straight allies to designate future teams in the same fashion, and to create a 'positive space' framework for the Canada Games, a national multi-sport movement for elite athletes in the critical younger age groups (16 to 23 years old). We are likely to face some challenges as the next Olympics are in China and the next Commonwealth Games are in India – two countries where homosexuality remains illegal. Commonwealth Games Canada was reluctant to push hard on this while Halifax was still a bid city for the 2014 Games, but the withdrawal of that bid is one more obstacle out of the way. Interestingly, the Organizing Committee for the London 2012 summer Olympics has already created an LGBT liaison position within its committee structure – thus demonstrating that host cities (if not the Olympic movement itself) are more open to discussion on homophobia issues.



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One year later, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) surprised me. In February 2007, the IOC published a *Consensus Statement on Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Sport*. This document flows from an October 2006 conference on the topic convened by the IOC Medical Commission. At this conference, leading sports psychologists, sociologists, psychiatrists and policy experts from around the world discussed literature and best practices. Four Canadians participated in this effort – academics Margery Holman from the University of Windsor and Sandra Kirby from the University of Winnipeg, sport leader Sally Mountjoy from Guelph and ex-NHLer Sheldon Kennedy from Calgary.

From a global perspective, Canada is an enlightened place, and it is no surprise that existing legislative and policy frameworks in Canada already largely comply with the IOC statement. However, I am hugely impressed that the IOC agrees that the issue of hazing (defined by the IOC as ‘abusive initiation rituals that often have sexual components and in which newcomers are targeted’) and homophobia (‘a form of prejudice and discrimination ranging from passive resentment to active victimization of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people’) are important to the health and well-being of athletes and must be addressed. When the IOC speaks, the sports world listens, and this document represents a huge step forward.



One final, heartening project with which I’m currently involved is the True Sport Foundation. This group is well funded by government and the private sector (Bell Canada) and its mandate is to promote a value-based system of sport in Canada. Since the fall 2006, I have been working closely with the high performance programs of eight national sport organizations on a pilot project to identify and overcome the obstacles to providing a safe and rewarding sport experience for their elite participants. While this project is certainly not focused on homophobia, I am finding a surprising receptivity to the notion that performance excellence requires a safe space. If we are going to ask our athletes to pull out the performance of a lifetime at a specific point and place in time in the face of the best competition that the world can throw at them, then those athletes must be free from all distraction,

including the distraction, hardship and pain of living in the closet.

Not all has been positive however. This winter I had the experience of counselling the father of a talented, teenaged hockey player who had been expelled from a well-respected elite hockey school in southern Alberta

for being a lesbian. Despite the investment this girl and her family had made in her development and the school, there was little legal recourse because the school had no affiliation with Hockey Alberta or Hockey Canada (and thus was not subject to their policies on equity and discrimination) and the school was also private (thus falling outside the jurisdiction of Alberta’s human rights laws, which are already the least far-reaching in the nation). The only bright spot in this experience, as I saw it, was that the coach at the school was revealed as a bigot, and



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it was a good thing that the parents' much-loved and supported daughter was no longer in this poisoned environment.

Stay tuned for my next column.

Resources:

Seeing the Invisible, Speaking about the Unspoken

http://www.caaws.ca/pdfs/CAAWS_Homophobia_Discussion_Paper_E.pdf

IOC Consensus Statement on Sexual Harassment and Abuse

http://www.sportlaw.ca/newsletter/2007_winter/winter_2007_files/IOC_statement_on_harassment_and_abuse.pdf

Next issue: Rachel explores this emerging global sport movement in the next issue of The OUTbox

New LGBTQ parent group formed

LGBTQ parents and folks who are interested in becoming parents are invited to join a new LGBTQ parenting group here in Niagara. The next meeting is June 20 at 7pm. at 42 Chaplin St. in St. Catharines.

The informal meetings offer mutual support and friendship, with discussions around parenting issues and specific issues with regards to being (or wanting to be) LGBTQ parents.

For more information, please contact bionicbabe@sympatico.ca



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This column marks those important occasions in our lives, such as births, deaths, adoptions, marriages, unions, graduations and other significant events.

Ted Mouradian says he's lucky to "be on this side of the grass" after open-heart surgery earlier this year. To read his story, please see <http://www.cooperativeaction.com/newsletter/2007/feb07.html>

June Callwood, a tireless champion for social justice in Canada, died in Toronto on April 13 after a long fight with cancer. She was 82. Among her many accomplishments, she was the founder of Casey House Hospice, for people dying of AIDS, which opened in 1988 at a time when there was little effective treatment for the disease.



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The next issue of *The OUTbox* is Saturday, Sept. 1, with a firm copy/photo deadline of Saturday, Aug. 11 at 12 noon. Please send submissions to the outbox@outniagara.ca