



GALHA NEWS

NEWS FROM THE LGBT SECTION OF THE BRITISH HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

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PACKED LUNCH - EGG(HEAD) AND TOAST!

On November 30th 2013 Galha held its annual fundraising lunch at Browns' Courtrooms in London's Covent Garden.

We were thrilled to welcome CJ de Mooi as our special guest speaker.

CJ found fame as a regular on BBC TV's 'Eggheads' quiz show. He is also an actor, a producer, a model, and an author. He has been President of the English Chess Federation and is a Distinguished Supporter of the British Humanist Association. He is a supporter of Stonewall

and homelessness charities, having been homeless himself for 3 years as a teenager. He has been an Ambassador for the National Bullying Helpline and worked for Barnado's, The Albert Kennedy Trust, and Great Ormond Street Hospital. He has recently been lobbying to help Russian LGBT activists around the Sochi Olympics.

It was his own experience of living rough and his work with homelessness charities that formed the meat of CJ's personal and moving talk. See CJ's guest column below for more on this.



Galha Chair Adam Knowles with guest speaker CJ de Mooi

The event was well attended and we were pleased to be joined by several new faces as well as many regulars who have supported Galha staunchly over the years.

The fundraising aspect of the meal was a success, with the raffle proving particularly popular. The star prize - two tickets to see Professor Brian Cox and comedian Robin Ince in their 'Christmas Compendium of Reason' at the Hammersmith Apollo, kindly donated by friend of Galha Robin Ince - were won by Jan Hofmann.

A bonus prize was added on the day by CJ, who generously donated a set tour of his new television series. This was won by Bryce Morrison.

Thanks to everyone who came and helped to make such a memorable meal.



ROUGHLY SLEEPING - CJ DE MOOI WRITES EXCLUSIVELY FOR GALHA NEWS



I became homeless shortly after my 17th birthday. To many, this may have seemed surprising as, from a very superficial surface veneer, I was raised in a respectable middle class household.

However, the two adults to whom I was blood related were violent, racist and homophobic and escaping to sleep rough was the only option I had.

I spent almost three years on the streets, with begging and other methods of survival becoming my daily norm. I had no idea if I was going, or indeed deserved, to live. However, by absolute blind chance I was able to break free and have sworn never by inaction to allow others to go through the same terrible experience.

The tragedy remains that mine is far from an isolated incident. Every single day, hundreds of people in Britain will face sleeping rough for the very first time.

Please take a moment to imagine how they

must feel. It isn't a fun camping trip... they'll have no warm sleeping bag, comfy clothes or shelter, just the prospect of a frightened, uncertain and possibly very short term, future. Many of those will be young, quite possibly just children, and many of those will be gay.

I was a gay man, just out of school, walking out into a thunderstorm on a cold March evening with no idea of what I was going to do. That is the kind of fear these people will face tonight

We all know the horrifying stories of gay people taking their own lives because they are unable to cope with being alone and scared. Such reports make me physically sick. We live in an affluent 21st century country where people are still allowed to feel so afraid of their natural feelings that killing themselves becomes the only viable option. Actually scratch that... such reports make me bloody angry.

I could never in good conscience allow any young gay person to unwillingly sleep on the streets if I'm able personally prevent it. I've been very lucky in my professional life

so can afford to pay for accommodation and services access for a few who need it. I can go out onto the streets and provide amenities from time to time. Then again, I've done this in central London on December 25th in two recent years and saw no-one from any charity doing the same thing. I found that shocking and immensely distressing when I saw the considerable demand with my own eyes. However, I can't do any of this constantly and that's what's desperately required. What little I do can only ever chip away at the tip of a very large iceberg and even though it makes a welcome difference to one or two, it hurts terribly to realise the thousands I've overlooked.

Last year I checked the British housing statistics and calculated it would require just 0.004% of our GDP to bring all derelict or abandoned buildings up to code in order to house the entire homeless population of the country. That is all. If the first responsibility of any government is the care of its citizenry, this and previous administrations have failed miserably and shamefully. Perhaps as homeless people generally aren't registered to vote, they

rarely matter to politicians. Cynical? Perhaps. Inaccurate? I'm yet to be convinced.

Homelessness can happen to anyone and believe me, I know. Most of us are only one or two pay cheques away from an abyss and such things as a home which are taken for granted can so rapidly disappear. A home should be a human right but for the majority of the world's population, including here in Britain, it remains a privilege. I am truly scared for the numbers who face every night with no roof over their heads.

When I think about individual cases, I always picture a young gay man, all alone, shivering with tears in his eyes. It inevitably brings me back to how I was all those years ago. I was very lucky but the majority aren't and those are the ones we simply have to reach out to.

Gay children are dying on the streets of our cities. That stark fact should be all the incentive anyone needs.

CJ de Mooi

STAND-UP FOR RUSSIA!

On December 13th 2013 Galha hosted a very special evening of stand up comedy to raise funds for the Russian LGBT Network.

As well as live performances from five top comedians - Tom Allen, Rachel Stubbings, Chris Neill, Lucy Frederick, and Chris Coltrane - attendees were treated to a surprise video introduction from 'professional homosexual', and camp comedy legend, Julian Clary.

Organiser Richard Unwin said:

"We at Galha felt that it was important to do something to help our LGBT brothers and sisters in Russia, who are facing an increasingly impossible situation. And while we fully support, and have participated in, the various protests and campaigns, such as putting pressure on the sponsors of the Sochi Olympic Games, we thought that the most practical thing that we could do was to get much needed funds to those in Russia who are fighting on the front line.

"We've been overwhelmed by the support of the comedians who've volunteered their time to help us in this endeavour."



Above: Julian Clary urges punters to 'dig deep into their hessian pockets' in a video recorded exclusively for Galha.

Galha Chair Adam Knowles said:

"Galha recently hosted a talk from veteran campaigner Peter Tatchell, who was keen to emphasise that, while it's important to keep up international pressure on President Putin, this is ultimately a problem that will have to be solved by the people of Russia. He paid tribute to the incredibly brave Russian activists and campaigners who risk their lives and safety to protest the 'gay propaganda' law, and said that helping to fund their courageous efforts was probably the most useful thing that we could do from here in the UK."

A total of £443.38 was raised for the Russian LGBT network. Our thanks to the performers and all who attended and helped us raise funds for such a worthy cause.



Tom Allen (left) and Chris Neill (right) keeping the crowd entertained.



NOTICEBOARD

MIKE RICKWOOD

Long time Galha stalwart Mike Rickwood has recently had to stand down from his Committee duties due to ill health. Mike has been one of Galha's principal personnel for many years and his capacity for keeping his head whilst those around him are losing theirs is something that has been greatly valued!

Whilst he is expected to have to spend an extended period in hospital, we are told that Mike is likely to make a full recovery. All of us at Galha send love and best wishes to Mike and his partner Roy and hope for a speedy restoration.

Anyone wishing to visit Mike in hospital should contact us on editor@galha.org for details.

E-MAIL ADDRESSES

There are a number of members for whom we do not have e-mail addresses. Please get in touch with us and let us know if you do use an e-mail address but don't think we have it - i.e. you do not receive any electronic communication from us. E-mail is a useful way of keeping our members informed about our activities, and sometimes we use it to let you know about events that we are unable to list in the newsletter because of time constraints. (It's always worth keeping an eye on our Facebook and Meetup websites for the very latest news - see details in the bar at the bottom of this page.)

CAN YOU HELP?

We're always keen to achieve as much as we can with Galha, and we think we're doing a good job, especially with the added support of the BHA - but at present the Committee's ambition is outweighing the amount of work that we are practically able to carry out with limited personnel! We're on the lookout for volunteers. As well as hoping to fill elected committee positions, we would also be interested to hear from anyone who thinks that they may be able to assist in the following areas: Press, campaigns,

helping out with Galha presence at the various Pride festivals around the country, helping to coordinate a 'local branch' scheme, assisting with the running of events.

We are also looking for someone to fill the role of Operations Officer:

This is an elected committee position. It would involve duties such as: Preparing material for meetings. Drafting letters. Replying to correspondence. Taking care of administrative tasks arising from meetings.

If you think that you could help out with any of the above, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us on: editor@galha.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

Two Plays: 'Mrs Darwin Entertains' & 'Darwin's Bulldog Bites Soapy Sam'. Wednesday 26th February, 7.30pm, Conway Hall, London.

A dramatic double-bill, produced in association with Conway Hall Ethical Society, to celebrate Darwin Day.



Film Screening: 'Gay Sex in the 70's' Friday 4th March, 7.30pm, Conway Hall, London.

A slightly belated event to mark LGBT History Month. Join us for an evening of steamy nostalgia as this documentary film examines the sexual behaviour of gay men in the seventies, and the AIDS epidemic that put a stop to the 'golden era'.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Friday 11th April

Full details and precise time to be confirmed. We intend for the AGM to proceed an evening event at Conway Hall that is yet to be finalised.

OUT IN AFRICA - YEMISI ILESANMI



Galha's guest speaker at Conway Hall on January 10th was Yemisi Ilesanmi, pictured here with Galha Chair Adam Knowles. Yemisi gave a talk on the fight for gay rights in Africa titled: 'Homosexuality Is Not Un-African'.

EDITOR'S NOTES

As I write this editorial we are almost a week into the Sochi Winter Olympics. Already there have been reports of LGBT campaigners being arrested. Here in the UK we are still reeling from the horror of Channel 4's documentary - 'Hunted' - which detailed how Russian neo-Nazi gangs kidnap and torture young gay men and then post videos of the abuse on social networking sites. That these groups were quite happy to be filmed and didn't attempt to disguise their identities is a terrifying sign of the state of things in Russia. The 'gay propaganda' law that prevents positive or even neutral discussion of homosexuality is directly responsible for an environment in which thugs can carry out such atrocities without fear of persecution.

Russian authorities have justified the draconian law by claiming that it is intended to 'protect' children. In reality they are letting down the countless young LGBT people who now have no access to support groups or social networks, not to mention the young

people who have been ensnared by such abhorrent torture gangs that operate with apparent impunity. Putin would like the Russian people to believe that homosexuals are synonymous with paedophiles, but the truth is that it is he and his government who are guilty of mass child abuse.

It is important that when the winter sports are over, and the spotlight moves on, that we don't let up the international pressure on Putin and his cronies - for the sake of every young person in Russia.



JAMES DREYFUS SUPPORTS LGBT RUSSIA!

Richard Unwin
Editor@galha.org