



STARLIGHT

Starlight Black Child Mixed Heritage Group
March 2008

A newsletter for families, friends and professionals with a keen interest in issues related to black young people of mixed heritage.

Editorial

Hello to you and welcome to this, the March edition of the Starlight newsletter.

As you will see further inside, here in Oxford we've seen the ugly face of racism peering out at us from behind anonymous computer screens. The comments posted on the website of our local paper are about our group's founder and Director of Starlight Enterprise, Sue Funge. It has been an unpleasant and painful reminder to us just how strongly some people feel about the issues of mixed relationships. We feel it is important to share some of them with you to demonstrate the degree of prejudice we face and to remind us all why we must keep on doing what we're doing.

For me, it has also been a reminder that, if we believe in equality, we have to fight for it. We mustn't wait for the issues which we feel affect us directly but must challenge prejudice when we see it. For many years I kept the issue of racism in a separate compartment in my head, away from other forms of oppression and discrimination. Life has taught me however that those who hate black people often hate gay and lesbian people and discriminate against those with physical and mental disability or illness.

Racists, like those who commented on the website of our local paper, are often articulate and intelligent. They will have reached their current prejudice for any number of reasons and be unwilling to move from there. Nor can we force them to. All we can do is address our own prejudices -my own was mental illness until it affected somebody close to me. We can challenge things in small ways every day, often in just addressing the subliminal and unconscious messages we may have acquired through our life experiences. Otherwise we are in danger of passing these same messages on to our own children or those in our care. For example, I was thrilled to be able to take my family to the wedding (Ok, civil ceremony) of two gay friends of ours. Not only was it the best wedding



**Christine Chambers
The Editor**

I've ever been to, it allowed my children to see that relationships outside society's norm are equally valid and loving.

Knowing that prejudice can operate on many levels, covert and overtly, I feel better equipped to deal with it. I remember a good friend telling me many years ago that the thing he found most difficult to cope with was the unpredictability of when and how racism would affect him. He could never prepare for the times when a car would slow down and the passenger would shout abuse or when he would be invited somewhere, only to be greeted with frosty silence by other guests. If we believed it was going to get better, we can thank the tabloids and their constant barrage of hatred towards those coming into the country now, for hindering this progress. The headlines about 'bogus' asylum seekers have refuelled the fires and we ignore the consequences at our own peril. I am privileged to have friends who came to this country seeking asylum, who have experienced things I'd only ever read about -war, murder, genital mutilation- and I am in awe of their resilience and unwillingness to hate. If they can overcome the terrible things they've endured, we can stand against the prejudice shown to us and overcome the pain it brings. But we must never forget that those things exist and that our battle is a shared one.

If I needed a reminder why we mustn't give up, it came to me in the best way possible recently -my

daughter, Sita had a beautiful and healthy baby boy on the 20th of February, Milo. She told me just last week that, for the first time ever, racism frightens her. I can't change that. What I can do is exactly what Sue had set out to do by running the Going for Gold course -instil in my children and grandchildren a sense of pride in themselves and the things which other black and mixed-heritage people have achieved despite adversity and discrimination. I can help to raise their self-esteem and promote the development of a positive racial identity by offering them my own positivity and acceptance.

He is a famous poet but do you know who he is?



If you are studying GCSE English Literature then you may well know this man. He was born on 21 June 1949 in British Guiana (now Guyana). He moved to England in 1977, where he became a touring lecturer for the Commonwealth Institute, travelling to schools throughout the UK to promote a better understanding of Caribbean culture. We have included one of his poems in this issue - let us know what you think. He has also won the Paul Hamlyn Award for Poetry in 1997 and has travelled extensively throughout the world performing his poetry.

Turn to page 4 to find out who this poet is.

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Special points of interest:

- Local press coverage and the aftermath
- New Premises and our Open Day
- Australia apologises at last
- **FREE SUBSCRIPTION**

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Please ensure any contributions/ adverts arrive by 31 May 2008

Next issue: June 2008

Article in local press is met with extreme racism

by Christine Chambers

Sue Funge was recently featured in an article in our local newspaper, the Oxford Mail, about the Going for Gold course which she had been running from her own home. The course offers black and mixed heritage young people the opportunity to explore black history to boost their self-esteem and develop a strong sense of identity. It is an accredited course and allows young people who may have struggled in the formal education system to achieve a worthwhile certificate. Sue designed and developed the course herself and has worked hard to get local authorities and many other organisations and agencies working with young people to take it up.



Sue Funge with Marie Jones & her son Cameron

For those of you who don't know Sue, it is important to put this course, and her work generally, into context. It is fair to say that Sue has devoted her life, professionally and personally, to trying to ensure that all of our children are treated equally and are able to fulfil their potential. She first established the Black Child Mixed Parentage Group back in 1994 and has

since offered her time and energy to parents who have needed support in challenging the racism which their children face.

It is clear, then, that it was exciting and encouraging that the local press coverage of such a positive initiative was supportive. The Oxford Mail, like most other newspapers, also offers readers the opportunity to read the stories online, and to comment on them. Unfortunately, since the Oxford Students Union invited the BNP leader, Nick Griffin, to speak in November last year, the Oxford Mail website has attracted a lot of attention from the BNP and other racists. The readers' forum is obviously offered by the paper to give people the opportunity to discuss current issues. However, within hours of the story being online, there were the most extremely offensive, racist comments being posted. Here are some examples;

Black youth and manhood is, the whole world over, much, much more savage than white.. Before the black folk and the Asians poured into our country against our will, ...We had a stable, secure and largely happy society whose homogenous members, from top to bottom, were proud of who they were. And then up pops the do-gooder. Pity the poor immigrant! Let 'em all in! Give them a house and benefits! He came from a broken home! Jail the racists and not the poor, misunderstood foreign folk....'

'I'll tell you just one of the dreadful things that black manhood brought to this country, Sue. As soon as the black man arrived he began coupling with our girls and mixed-race children like yours were produced. Of all such productive couplings that occurred over the last 60 years, Sue, how many of black dads were responsible enough to stick around and bring up the children they

made?...just a few years back you were making a baby with a racial stranger whose track record suggested that he might not be the ideal dad...Perhaps you who appears to know so much better than the rest of us how to make a fine, upstanding black citizen, would care to enlighten us as to what happened to the man whose son is now being raised by the British taxpayer?'

'If this idiot had found herself a White man she would probably be in clover now in some nice house with a few nice White kids at Uni...Instead she ruined her whole life running round after young Tyrone who looks nothing like her and has the IQ of a tree stump...then she wonders why he is violent and stupid... HINT it's genetic, Sue, we are NOT all equal Black IQ is good 15 points lower than WHITE as history will bear out, some build civilization some destroy it...The powers that be are so panicked they have had to dumb down the whole school curriculum lest it becomes apparent...thus making the White kids idiots also...But hey at least we're all 'equal'....'

'She would do better were she to use her own experiences to warn young girls against becoming one of the disproportionately high number of single mothers raising mixed race children.'

'I find it ironic that whilst many British children- white- are made to feel guilty about their ancestry and preached to with the 'we're all the same' mantra, that mixed-race/black children are taught to be proud to be black/ proud of their race.'

It is hard to read these things, even for the second or third time, but it is important that we share them. They help to demonstrate exactly why it is so important that we keep raising the issues.

Proposed changes in Discrimination Laws

Equalities minister, Harriet Harman, is said to be in the process of drawing up a new policy to ensure that black employees and women are able to achieve equality. Already in use in America, the controversial 'positive action' tactic is set to open up a legal minefield in Britain, with employers allowed to show preference to minority applicants with the relevant qualifications. It would only apply in situations where two applicants were equally qualified, with employers then allowed to tip the balance in favour of the female or black candidate.



Harriet Harman

Of course, most MPs claim that the job

should be offered on the basis of merit alone and Harman is likely to face opposition even from her fellow cabinet ministers. Avon Fire Service, in which 97% of firefighters are white males, was widely condemned when it recently tried to redress the balance in staffing ratios by holding a recruitment day which was not open to white applicants.

The Equalities Bill will also give breastfeeding mothers new rights to feed their babies in public. At the moment, they can be asked to stop feeding their child on trains and in cafes. Harman also hopes to address the issue of women being paid less and told the TUC women's conference that she is considering introducing an initiative which will demand that companies hold pay audits to examine and review any differences between male and female salaries

(The Observer 16-03-08).

Some statistics...

Although black and ethnic minority people make up only 7% of the UK population, 57% of the young people seen by homeless charity, Centrepoin, for advice or support were black or minority groups (www.centrepoin.org.uk)

African-Caribbean pupils are 3 to 6 times more likely to be excluded from school than their white peers for the same offence (www.jrf.org.uk)

Black and minority ethnic (BME) households are 6 times more likely to live in over crowded conditions than white households (www.shelter.org.uk)



Half-Caste

Excuse me
standing on one leg
I'm half-caste

Expain yusef
wha yu mean
when yu say half-caste
yu mean when picasso
mix red an green
is a half-caste canvas/
explain yusef
wha yu mean
when yu say half-caste
yu mean when light an shadow
mix in de sky
is a half-caste weather/
well in dat case
england weather
nearly always half-caste
in fact some o dem cloud
half-caste till dem overcast
so spiteful dem dont want de sun pass
ah rass/
explain yusef
wha yu mean
when yu say half-caste
yu mean tchaiekovsky
sit down at dah piano
an mix a black key
wid a white key
is a half-caste symphony/

Explain yusef
wha yu mean
Ah listening to yu wid de keen
half of mih ear
Ah lookin at yu wid de keen
half of mih eye
and when I'm introduced to yu

I'm sure you'll
understand
why I offer yu half-a-hand
an when I sleep at night
I close half-a-eye
consequently when I dream
I dream half-a-dream
an when moon begin to glow
I half-caste human being
cast half-a-shadow
but yu must come back tomorrow

wid de whole of yu eye
an de whole of yu ear
an de whole of yu mind

an I will tell yu
de other half
of my story

Update from Starlight Black Child Mixed Heritage Group

We finally have an office thanks to the support of the Catalyst Communities Housing Association and particularly Sasha East, their Community Involvement Coordinator. We are now based at Kingfisher Green in Greater Leys and we are looking forward to utilising the meeting space for community activities. We have also moved the book and toy library to these new premises. To celebrate the end of this long struggle to have our own space we are hosting an Open Day on Saturday, 24 May between 1 and 4.30pm. (see advert below)

All local families are welcome to come along and find out more about the group and the library. In the afternoon will be a guest speaker, Carolyn Mabesa Newall from the Family Placement Team, who will be talking about fostering and adoption, particularly of black and mixed heritage children. We hope this will mark the start of a regular event with a guest speaker offering information, advice or guidance relevant to the group.

Starlight Black Child Mixed Heritage Group

OPEN DAY

At 26 Kingfisher Green (The Leys News office)

ON SATURDAY, 24 May 2008 1PM—4.30PM

Visiting Speaker: Carolyn Mabesa Newall
from OCC's Family Placement Team

EVERYONE WELCOME

Come and find out more about our group, view
the toys & books and find out how to join.

REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED

EXTRACT FROM ARTICLE IN THE OXFORD MAIL (Wednesday, 20 Feb 2008)

'Black and mixed race kids taught from mum's living room' By Debbie Waite

A white mother is so concerned about black and mixed race pupils 'falling through' the education net, she is running a course on black history from her own living room.

Sue Funge, 53, used her experiences as a single mother to her son Rory, to create Going for Gold, which teaches young people of African Caribbean origin about their heritage, and encourages them to explore their own potential. Four boys and two girls aged 10-16 are currently studying at Ms Funge's home in Greater Leys, Oxford. And the free course is now being adopted by schools and even premiership football teams.

Ms Funge said: "As a white mother with a black son of mixed heritage I know there is a stereotype of black boys as troublemakers. And I feel that some teachers can be quite hard on them as a result. "In the case of my own son Rory, who was quite a shy boy, this meant he became withdrawn and his education suffered. But for many

young people, this focusing on negativity results in them becoming angry, and because they don't have a way of handling that anger, their behaviour becomes a self fulfilling prophecy."

In 2006, 47.5 per cent of the county's students achieved five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, but only 32.3 per cent of Oxfordshire's Black Caribbean pupils achieved the same five passes. Government figures show that African and Caribbean pupils, and those of mixed white and Afro-Caribbean heritage, perform consistently below the national average throughout the school system.

Ms Funge said: "I find it very disappointing that black children are failing here in Oxfordshire, but I think Going for Gold could help. "When it came to my own son I recognised the importance of equipping him with information about the significant contribution black people have made to British society.

Continued on page four



Continued from page three

"Going for Gold helps boys to learn about their heritage, to see what they are capable of and also shows them that school is a resource they can use to make a success of their lives. I would like to see all Oxfordshire's schools adopting this course."

Cameron Jones, 16, was suspended from school. He is now a student of Going for Gold alongside his GCSE studies. He said: "Before I joined the course I hadn't heard of many of the important people from black history because I had never learned about them in school. "As a black boy I sometimes feel that people take it for granted

that I will cause trouble. But knowing about my history has inspired me and I now know I can do well. I hope to take an Army Foundation course after my GCSEs and eventually enter officer training."

Cameron's mother, Marie Jones, said: "It's great to see the course having such a positive effect on Cameron's self esteem, to the extent where he has been into the Army recruiting office to discuss his options on his own, which I don't think he'd have had the confidence to do a few weeks ago."

Tanya Prescott's son Addis is only 10, but she is thrilled with his involvement. She said: "Addis

loves the course and came home beaming with pride yesterday. .. She added: "I am so pleased Addis got this opportunity. It's also great that at his age he is able to gain a qualification. I tell him it's evidence that he can do it and that it can be the first of many. I think Sue Funge has got something really powerful here."

The success of Going for Gold is now spreading to other parts of the country; The Bristol City Academy is incorporating the course into its mainstream curriculum for Year Nine students. And the premiership football clubs Fulham, Portsmouth and Southampton are considering running the Going for Gold course.

Who is he? (find out who the poet is on page one)

The poet's name is John Agard. We have reproduced the poem currently being studied in GCSE English 'Half-Caste' on page 3. What did you think about this poem?

He came to England from Guyana in 1977. Like many people from the Caribbean, he is mixed race - his mother is Portuguese, but born in Guyana and his father is black. One of the things he enjoys about living in Eng-

land is the wide range of people he meets: 'The diversity of cultures here is very exciting'.

However, one of the things he doesn't like is the view of racial origins, which is implied in the word 'half-caste', still used by many people to describe people of mixed race. The term is now considered rude and insulting.

Australia apologises at last

It has taken far too long, but at last, Australia has apologised to the children known as the 'stolen generation'. The recommendation for an apology was made in a report entitled *Bringing Them Home* 11 years ago but John Howard, then Prime minister, refused to deliver it. It was finally delivered in Parliament on the 13th of February by the new Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd.



Aborigine communities have comparatively low life expectancies

The 'stolen generation' are the children of mixed-race, usually born to Aboriginal mothers and European fathers, who were forcibly taken from their families and moved to church missions, orphanages and white foster homes in an attempt to enforce white assimilation. The policy

was government sanctioned and in force for many decades. At least 100,000 children were removed from the care of their families in an attempt to force them to forget their culture, language and identity.

The apology is an issue of great contention, with vociferous debate about whether it should be the springboard to offering compensation to those who still suffer the enormous impact of the separation and, in many cases, the resulting cruelties they endured. Tony Abbott, spokesman for the opposition's indigenous affairs, claimed that many children were, in fact, 'rescued' from parents who were unwilling or unable to provide them with sufficient homes and nutrition or who had abandoned them. The evidence of countless witnesses belies this statement.

One woman, Zita Wallace, who was stolen from her family at the age of 7, in 1947, describes the harsh conditions in which the traumatised children were accommodated. She says they were given beds with rough blankets and no sheets, and the younger children were offered no consolation or comfort by the adults entrusted with their care. Instead, the older children tried to soothe them. Now 68 years old, Zita reveals that the children were 'belted' for speaking in their own language and were described as 'pagans' and 'spawn of the devil'. Placed in a Catho-

lic children's institution hundreds of miles from home, she witnessed physical and sexual abuse and describes the hard domestic work the children had to carry out. She was not allowed to leave until she was 19.

Whilst Aboriginal activists call for a compensation fund of \$1 billion dollars to be set up, the government has clearly stated that no reparations will be made. It was careful to avoid asking the current population to make any amends for the mistreatment of their Aboriginal countrymen. It looks like an issue that will never be fully resolved. (**The Guardian 11-02-08**)

*Yowie, yowie, my brown skin baby
They take him away.
Between her sobs I heard her say
Police 'bin take my baby away,
From white man boss baby I had,
Why he let them take baby away?
To a children's home the baby came
With new clothes on and a new name,
But day and night he would always say,
Mummy, oh mummy why they take me
away?*

*Yowie, yowie, my brown skin baby
They take him away.*

Bob Randall

This was part of a song written by one of the children taken away from his Aboriginal mother and put in a children's home. He wrote it as an adult when he had become a singer and songwriter.

FREE SUBSCRIPTION

We are keen to widen dissemination of our newsletter and are pleased to announce that we will not be requesting any renewal of subscription charges. Hopefully the benefit of sharing information with a wider audience will outweigh the loss of income in subscription fees. Please forward this issue to anyone else you feel may like to join our list of subscribers. The newsletter is produced quarterly in December, March, June and September and we would like to increase the number sent via e-mail to save on printing and postage costs and help the environment too.

Send us your views or articles

We welcome contributions from our readers and look forward to receiving your contribution. We hope that this newsletter will provide a forum for promoting positive relations, encouraging an open debate and aiming to improve race relations in Britain today. The deadline for the next issue is May 2008.

Advertise in this Newsletter

Let us know about your events, services and situations vacant. Our rates are very reasonable.
Full page: £150
1/2 page: £85
1/4 page: £45
1/8 page: £25
Please contact us with details. The deadline for the June newsletter is 31 May 2008.