

# BENT BARS PROJECT

a letter-writing project for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, gender-variant, intersex, and queer prisoners in Britain



## Newsletter #7 - Autumn 2018

### **Hello everybody and welcome to the Bent Bars Newsletter #7!**

The theme for this issue is “Time Capsules” and we got lots of amazing letters from you telling us about what you would put in a time capsule. It got us thinking about what we at Bent Bars would put in a box that people might find one day in the future. Of course we would put in a copy of the newsletters - including this one! Probably we would also put in some of our posters and the forms we ask you and outside penpals to fill in, just so that people in the future could really understand the project. Definitely on the list would be some of the lovely letters we get from all of you, we really appreciate when you write to us and let us know how you are getting on. Obviously we wouldn't add them without your

permission first! We think it would also be nice to put in a photograph of the collective, though there have been so many people over the years who have supported Bent Bars that it might be difficult to put everyone's photo in. Inspired by one of the letters we received we'd probably also put in a mix CD of some of our favourite LGBTQ musicians. If you look on page 28 you can see what some of our favourite artists that we'd like to include would be. We've also included some LGBTQ Time Capsule facts from history on different pages in the newsletter marked by the  symbol.

In some ways Bent Bars is starting to feel like a time capsule as February 2019 is our ten year anniversary! We're really proud to have been working on this project with all of you for this long and it's definite-

ly inspired our theme for the next issue (look at the back page to see more).

We want to say thanks to everyone for their wonderful contributions, to M & E for all their help typing up everyone's submissions, and to Matt for making all the great puzzles you see in the following pages.

Please keep in mind that some of the content in the letters of this newsletter deals with heavy and difficult subjects so take care while you are reading and enjoy!

Love from Bent Bars x x

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## Be yourself and be proud

*By Richard*

When I was younger, deep down in the ground,  
I buried a parcel, never to be found,  
A capsule full of woulds, shoulds and oughts,  
Filled with true feelings, desires and thoughts,  
Would people accept me, if I told them the truth,  
Would they support me, or would they hit the roof,  
I should be happy, and tell them I'm gay,  
It was not my choice, I was born this way,  
I ought to be truthful, to others, and me,  
Surely they will still love me, if I tell them I'll see,  
My mom turned to me, and these words she did say,  
"I will love you no matter, whether you're straight or gay,"  
Her words warmed my heart, and made me feel strong,  
The feelings I long buried, I didn't feel ashamed or wrong,  
The later as months done, on a dark rainy day,  
My dad turned to me, and said, "you'd better not be gay"  
My world crumbled again, all of my worst fears,  
I would have to live a lie, for the rest of my years,  
The years went on, and I settled down,  
Met my partner, had children, always a smile, never a frown,  
But all of those feelings were too strong one day,  
I could no longer live a lie, I knew I was gay,  
But the path I then walked, naïve, curious and alone,  
Led me to a place with bars, I would have to call my home,  
With plenty of time, to reflect upon my life,  
I've lived a life full of lies, caused myself pain and strife,  
So to you, I say be yourself and be proud,  
Don't make my mistake and bury that capsule under ground,  
Stand tall, be proud, be happy and be strong  
You are who you are, and nothing about you is wrong.

## DEAR BENT BARS

I would like to thank the Bent Bars Collective for all of the wonderful support I have received over the last 7 years, and for yet another fantastic newsletter. But I would also like to thank all of the contributors to the role models issue for such great writing.

It came as no great surprise that for many of you, your role models were other LGBTQI prisoners that you have come into contact with during your time in prison. I, too, have met many fellow LGBTQI prisoners who have been a complete inspiration to me. Some of them prefer not to identify as LGBTQI and so I generally refer to them as living an alternative lifestyle.

Anyway, I just wanted to let all of you know that, like them, I consider you all to be my role models. You all write with such honesty and bravery. I have been receiving the Bent Bars Newsletter since it was first published in 2009, and you all continue to inspire me with each and every article, letter or poem you write. You inspire me that much that I would like to share a bit of my story and my journey through the prison LGBTQI/ alternative lifestyles community.

I first knew that I was different to other boys at 10 years old. I knew I was a boy, I felt like a boy, but I just wasn't interested in anything boyish. I spent the majority of my time as a child playing dress-up, mum's + dad's and mak-

ing mud pies with the girls. This continued into primary school, where I would prefer to play 'Elastics' or 'Hop Scotch' instead of football or 'British Bulldog'.

Although I knew I was a boy (I definitely didn't want to be a girl) I didn't understand why I wasn't attracted to girls like the other boys were, and I also didn't understand why it was that I was attracted to boys, like all of the girls were. Of course, I had no understanding of the concept of being gay then, but I was so embarrassed by how I felt about other boys that I couldn't say anything about it. I grew up in the late 1980's and 1990's when the public perception of homosexuality was very different to what it is today. The tragic effects of the AIDS epidemic weren't helping the cause either. When I finally realised that I was in fact gay, it was at an impossible time to come out. I feared rejection and even being physically hurt. I also suffered with low self esteem and confidence issues, so this prevented me from talking to others or even exploring my sexuality.

This went on through secondary school, and although there was lots of speculation about my sexuality, I always denied that I was anything other than heterosexual. I even slept with a girl a few years older than I was just to prove that I wasn't gay. (Only the once and I've never slept with another woman since.) I just kept my feelings to my-

self; suppressed my emotions and my true self and just tried to live as normal a life as possible.

It wasn't long before the pressure and stress of living a lie began to really get me down and depressed. I was drinking a lot, using all kinds of drugs and felt incredibly suicidal. When I turned 21 I just couldn't take the pressure of it all anymore, and I had a complete mental breakdown. I was at the lowest point in my life and I bravely made the decision to 'come out'. I thought that the love and support I was receiving from my breakdown would help buffer the news, but how wrong I was. My family rejected me. I was heartbroken, but now the news was out there, there was no going back. Over the period of a few months my family began, one by one, to come to terms with the fact I was gay, but the subject was never really mentioned, it was just swept under the carpet and life went on.

Although I was 'out' so to speak, I wasn't in an area with a gay scene or even a gay community and so I wasn't able to meet guys and just be myself around them. None of my straight friends would come to a gay club with me either. Okay, I was gay, they accepted that. But going to a gay club was a big no-no for them.

Again, the years passed by, I was still single, still alone in my little gay world and I turned back to the drink and drugs as a way of coping. It was sadly at this time that I committed the of-

fence that I am now in prison for. I truly thought that my life was now over. All I knew about prison was from what I'd seen on TV and I was petrified. I thought about killing myself before somebody got the chance to.

The first few months were pretty scary, trying to adjust to prison life and keep my sexuality secret. But it wasn't long before I settled into the routine and made some friends. Most were straight, but there was a few gay guys too. It was about 6 months into my sentence that I decided to come out to my circle of friends in prison. They were so incredibly supportive. Most of them said that they already knew and were just waiting for me to feel comfortable enough to come out of my own accord. I soon got invited to the LGBT support group called 'Real Voices'. Through this group, my friends and other members of the group, I received all the support I needed to start living as a proud gay man. I knew that if I could do it in prison, I could do it once I was released.

I eventually became a Real Voices rep and later became the coordinator of the group. I was then transferred to another prison and helped to set up a Real Voices there, which I ran for two years. I really got involved in fighting for LGBTQI prisoners' rights and ensuring that we as a community had a voice. I have even raised campaigns through Stonewall, Press for Change and the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, to ensure that all LGBTQI prisoners can enjoy the equality and acceptance, not

tolerance, that they deserve.

Over the years the Bent Bars Newsletter, and the Bent Bars Collective (whom I've been lucky enough to meet twice at prison LGBT history month events), have been such massive sources of encouragement, support and inspiration to me and I just want to say a big thank you to all of you because you are the most genuine and inspirational people in my life.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish the Real Voices group here at the prison where I am currently located a very happy 15th birthday for this year. This surely has to be one of - if not the - longest running support groups of its kind in the whole of the prison system. I am due to be released soon (If I don't achieve parole before then), and it is my aim and hope to campaign to ensure that all UK prisons have a support group such as Real Voices and that these groups will be so much more than just a tick-box exercise for the equality departments. I want to make sure that all LGBTQI people or anybody living an alternative lifestyle has a voice and that they may serve their time as accepted members of the wider prison community and not merely just tolerated as the current policies specify.

With love and best wishes to you all.

Hugs and Handbags,

Mike (AKA Queenie)

## DEAR BENT BARS

I am a recently (just over one year I now notice) openly trans male-female intending to undertake hormone and medical treatment. I am 55 and have questioned my identity pretty much all my life from when gender became relevant (at 11 when at schools that were not divided by gender we were split into boys on the left, girls on the right). Having spent the next 40 years trapped by family, friends and associates - or more accurately my worries about their reaction - I have finally acted on my wishes rather than my fears.

I can only praise the staff at a previous prison I was in who accepted my decision and treated me well. Another prison I was in took their time (six months) to accept that I was trans but then treated me well.

Sadly the prison I am currently in, while accepting I am trans, have treated me badly, probably due to inexperience and lack of training. I was tempted to apply for transfer but have decided for now to stay where I am and try to improve the prison for trans prisoners by being a pain in the arse



Lisa

## Elvis Lives Next Door

*By Matthew*

Elvis Lives Next Door

His hair's now white & cropped close

He sports a neat goatee

Wears loose trousers in the garden

A sweater that's thin at the elbows

Sometimes he smokes a pipe.

He's lost a lot of weight,

Looks better for it too, more healthy, than

He did in the seventies.

Now in his seventies, he smiles

Rather than sneers his lip, curling to a private joke.

He keeps himself to himself, though is friendly enough.

A regular in the local on a Friday night,

I didn't suspect it was him until

once, after a couple of Guinnesses, he got up for karaoke,

swivelling his

replacement hip.

As he hollered Jailhouse Rock,

He amazed us all.

Later in the gents, I had to ask

'Are you?' I let the question hang.

He turned from the sink fixed

me a stare,

With his steady brown eyes

Shrugged his shoulders and simply

said.....

..... "Un-huh".

## DEAR BENT BARS

I'm writing to thank you for my pen pal and for the recent copy of your Newsletter.

It was very heart warming to receive the Newsletter as this was my first & I felt myself really taken by the contents on role model etc. Great stuff!

As to imagining the future & what to put in a time capsule.

Maybe a bottle of tears & the scent of perfume with a letter. The letter would be a thank you, but also the story of a rocky road, of a he that always wanted to be a she. I could write to the future & make a paper butterfly with her wings open to stick on the envelope which I would seal with a lipstick kiss.

I wonder if it would be wrong to write to the future to let them know that I had spent over 20 years in prison before being released & that after a year of freedom events had take a turn for the worst & that I was back in prison for a long time. Despite all though, I could tell them that I had stopped being all things to all people & that my last steps were being me.

I think I'd end with this poem based on my memories. This poem is based on a night out, one of many.

On the subject of my transition – it is a slow process being in prison. But I shall be she soon.

Regards to all and thank you,  
Serena

### **Memories**

*By Serena*

I felt so happy being me  
Dressed as Serena  
On the wild side  
With shaven legs  
A sugar plum Fairy  
In a red satin dress

Amber perfume  
Sandalwood & dreams  
Eye liner mascara  
Rouge & lipstick

The swirl of a skirt  
Click clack of heels  
Dancing to the lights  
From twelve to four  
Before rushing home  
To be Cinderella no more

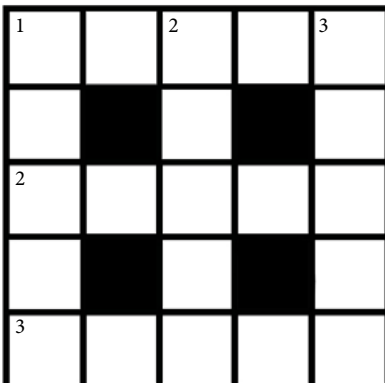
## DEAR BENT BARS

I was recently moved wings after a move around in the prison and I managed to meet up with some people that I know and that are also gay. I now choose who I associate with very carefully after previously talking to a prisoner on my previous wing about sexuality who then took advantage of me trying to find my sexual identity and sexually abused me. I think it goes without saying that this knocked me back a lot and I went in myself and refused to even consider being attracted to the same sex. Since then I have refused to be a victim and started the journey again. I am surprised to say that I managed to “find myself” a lot quicker and went past the point I was at before and I now identify as a gay male and very proud. One day on the new wing I was talking to another gay prisoner on association and someone came in to see him. I must be honest

and say that I had an instant crush on him and seemed to lose myself in his eyes but as usual he said he is straight. What he said next would previously have knocked me back and angered me. He said to me and my friend “how can you be gay, it’s like a disease.” I didn’t react but instead looked into his eyes. The look I saw was not disgust, it was a look of being “lost” and desperation. I have seen that look from my own eyes and I know that one day when the time is right he will be able to admit to himself and others and hold his head high. What he said got me thinking a few days later and I came to the conclusion that the only disease in homosexuality is homophobia and the only cure is more accepting society. Lets just hope people see the light sooner rather than later.

From Richard

## PUZZLE - TAKE FIVE



The three answers in this mini crossword read the same across and down. We’ve given you clues to the three answers but not necessarily in the right order. See how quickly you can solve it!

1. Mournful song
2. Meadow
3. Go inside

Answers at the back!



## Hollow Tree

*By Richard*

I'm a hollow tree with a squirrel in my head,  
the outside lives but the inside is dead  
The squirrel tells me all I need to know,  
like how I'm doing when the pain starts to show.

Then a woodpecker lands on my head,  
the outside crumbles cos the inside is dead.  
The woodpecker laughs at the nothingness inside,  
he sets up home for somewhere to hide.

The squirrel and the woodpecker up sticks and went,  
complaining too much with too much to vent.  
My existence forgotten, no flowers ever bloom,  
My roots are rotten,  
The darkness starts to loom.

I am a dying tree,  
Nobody sees me,  
I am a dying tree  
PLEASE SET ME FREE!




**Sappho, a Greek poet from the island of Lesbos, was born between 630-612 BCE, and died around 570 BCE. She was famous for her lesbian themes, giving her name and that of her homeland to the very definition of lesbianism (and the lesser used term of “sapphism”).**



## TWO HEARTS

*By Sophie*



As I lay asleep in my bed,  
I dream of you, you're in my head


Distance keeps us apart,  
A space between our hearts.

This time, that we have been apart,  
Has been hard on our two hearts.

Verbal words are hard to express,  
I get tongue tied, of that I attest.


If only my heart could speak,  
My love for you it would preach.

Remember this, it's from my heart,  
I've loved you so, right from the start.



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## OFFERING SUPPORT




I would like to say to you all: Hi and thank you for your Newsletter. And thank you for all the posters you sent me. I am asking for your help. As you know I am the Equality and Diversity Rep and I attend monthly meetings with the No. 1 Gov and Health Care, and the Equality Diversity officer and Gov. The problem I am having is getting in touch with gay men in the prison. As a gay prisoner I can do so much for them if I can just get to meet them. I can offer 100% confidentiality. I am here for them to talk to. To listen to them. I don't know how many prisoners you send your Newsletter to, but if I can help anyone I would be grateful.

Anyway five things to put in a time capsule, If I could it would have to be:

1. My first kiss.
2. A copy of your Newsletter
3. A picture of me in speedos on a hot day.
4. A bar of rock from Blackpool.
5. Real fish and chips. In newspaper. Do you think they would stay hot?

Anyway thanking you for your help in the past. And looking forward to your help yet again.

My love to you all.  
Yours always, Paul X



## DEAR BENT BARS

Got your Magazine today, con-  
grats, you've sent more mail to me in 7  
months that my family in 10 yrs.

Anywho, with your time capsule. First-  
ly I'd put images of the Paris terror  
attacks, then pictures of the whole of  
Europe coming together in a stand of  
defiance and Love. 'Specially the Eifel  
Tower in Tricolor colours.

Then a picture of Russian homophobics  
or "activists" beating, banning and  
generally feeling guilty of their own  
sexuality, with a message saying 'We  
hope in 200 years this is non-existent  
world-wide'

Then the film 'Pride'.

And lastly my Poem.

Les.

### A POEM

By Leslie

You can beat me, hurt me  
and let me down.  
I can stand shouting I'm free  
but you'll not hear a Sound.  
I now have a lot of likeminded  
friends  
I now have a Choice,  
We are real and love to bend!  
cos together, we have a Voice.



**Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) was an alliance of lesbians and gay men who formed in support of the striking British miners' during the year-long UK miners strike of 1984–85. By the end of the strike, there were 11 groups throughout the UK raising money to support the strike. The alliances which the campaign forged between the LGBT community and British labour groups proved to be an important turning point in the progression of LGBT issues in the UK. Miners' labour groups began to support, endorse and participate in various gay pride events throughout the UK including London's Gay and Lesbian Pride parade in 1985. The movie *Pride* is a dramatisation of these events.**

**You = There, Me = Content.**

*By Deacon-Jake*

He gives me smiles, saying so much,  
A goosebump jumps, without any touch.

He gives me courage, no longer lost,  
A radiant glow, thaws the frost.

He gives me comfort, expressions don't show,  
A hand on mine, help emotions flow.

He gives me confidence, with words unspoken,  
A growing belief, "I'm not broken".

He gives me feelings, unable to speak,  
A stirring flutter, knees go weak.

He gives me strength, about to fall,  
A whispered support, stand up tall.

He gives me love, hugs taste sweet,  
A stolen moment, stray soul complete.

He gives me hope, when thunders roar,  
Above all else, makes rainbows soar.



**Khnumhotep and Niankhkhnum were ancient Egyptian royal servants. They shared the title of Overseer of the Manicurists in the Palace of King Nyuserre Ini during the second half of the 25th century BC. They were buried together and are listed as “royal confidants” in their joint tomb. The tomb was discovered by Egyptologist Ahmed Moussa in Saqqara, Egypt in 1964. It is the only tomb in the necropolis where men are displayed embracing and holding hands. They are believed to be the first recorded same-sex couple in history!**

## AGE GAP - IS IT A PROBLEM?

I am a 48 year old gay mixed race guy, I eventually came out 3 years ago initially to myself and then to my ex-wife and my daughter.

I am happy not living a lie, but instead am living a dream. You see, I am attracted to 20 - 30 year old skinny lads, with no or little face hair.

Initially I met a lad on Gaydar, he lived in Wales, but after a few months chatting texting and flirting, he asked if he could move in with me. I agreed. I didn't realise he was bleeding me dry when I was at work - he was cheating on me. My first gay heartbreak. My

next partner was 42, he loved me - I liked him but wasn't attracted to him. That too ended.

Should I settle for someone my age and forget about "do they attract me" or is there younger guys out there who would love to settle down with an older guy for true love and not just for free digs and free cash.

Is it wrong to want to find love with someone half my age or should young love young, and old love old. Is it wrong to want to be loved!?

Replies welcome, Steve



20

## DEAR BENT BARS

You said I should write something for the Bent Bars newsletter. Well, I'll write my coming out life.

Dear readers I'm currently located at a prison where there is no LGBT group.

Anyway my dad's family are Greek and my mum's family are English. I was brought up in an extremely violent area and my friends were all in street gangs all over Northumberland. I'd see people get hurt every day, I'd see houses/buildings & cars petrol bombed. People were in fear of their lives. I never knew any gay people. If there were gay people, they'd be scared to come out. I never told anybody I liked males as my friends could reject me.

Then you have the very violent side of my family, connected to the mafia. So that's another reason I could not come out.

So, I lived a lie through my childhood until imprisonment as being gay.

I joined the Royal Marines, still in the closet.

I think my mum and dad knew I was different to other boys.

Then my religion is the Greek Orthodox Church. I believed I would not be accepted as gay with them so I had to stay in the closet.

Well anyway, when I came into jail aged 24, I could not handle the stress of being in the closet. So, I came out to my family and friends as gay. My full family including mafia are very supportive of me, my friends are supportive, and the Greek Orthodox Church said they do not judge anybody's sexuality and they never turn LGBT people away. My priest quoted the Greek Spartans enjoying gay sex.

Now. I feel I can tell anybody I'm gay, all my family will stand up to homophobics... so, nobody bats an eyelid.

Take care,  
DD



**Homosexuality in the militaries of ancient Greece was regarded as morale boosting. The Spartans had a tradition of military heroism that is said to be due to strong emotional bonds from homosexual relationships, though some fighters also had wives or other female lovers. Various ancient Greek sources record incidents of courage in battle and interpret them as men competing with each other to impress their male lovers!**

## A SONG

By Richard

**C** **Cmaj7**  
Dreaming, I'm only dreaming

**C7** **F** **G#** **Bb**  
And when I'm dreaming, it's always of you oh - ohh

**C** **Cmaj7**  
Soft light, music that delights

**C7** **F** **G#** **Bb** **C**  
No more saying no nights, 'cause I'm with you, you -----

**Em** **Am**  
I wanna live, but I don't know what to say

**Dm** **Fmaj7**  
I'd like to give you all my love, but I'd just dream it away

**C** **Cmaj7** **C7** **F** **G#** **Bb** **C**  
**G** Lonely, when I get lonely, I'm dreaming only, only of you

**Em** **Am**  
I wanna live, but I don't know what to say

**Dm** **Fmaj7**  
I'd like to give you all my love, but I'd just dream it away

**C**  
**G** Dreaming (I wanna live with you)

I'll carry on dreaming (Wanna make love to you)

And I'll do my scheming (gotta make love to you now!)

'til it comes true

Soft lights...

## **A STROLL THROUGH THE PARK**

*By Tony*

Strolling in the park  
Entombed within perfect tranquility  
The peacefulness violated  
As the leaves shuffle in the breeze

The autumn sunshine  
Glaring through the trees  
Casting long shadows in the breeze

The sense of space is intense  
I am not used to this aimlessness  
No sense of urgency as I stroll  
All is carefree within this scroll

I would see them everyday  
Everywhere I went, they went too  
There was no escape  
No respite to be had

To view them was to suffer shame,  
Ignominy and disgrace,  
Any attempt to avoid them was futile  
They could make me whimper  
Like a dog in distress

They lied to everone  
No matter whom  
They were filled with fear  
They feared the truth

On the day they lied no more  
I could gaze into them  
And no longer see the shame  
Now, as i gaze at my perfection in the mirror  
I no longer see;

Lying eyes.



## DEAR BENT BARS

I've got your Newsletter and saw on the back that the new theme is "Imagining the future:- what would you put in a time capsule." I've decided to try and contribute to this, I just hope it gets to you in time.

5 items:

- A copy of my coming out story – this is to show an example of how in a time of great acceptance, even when we get a great response when 'coming out' people have usually had to deal with the anticipation of a bad event. This anticipation points toward an assumption that coming out is bad news, hopefully not for generations in 200 years!! (I've included a copy in case you would like to print it elsewhere in the newsletter).
- A picture of me and my family and friends, all having fun and happy at a large party we are going to have. A snapshot of happiness, hope and love, for inspiration and to teach those in 200 years history isn't always misery, war and times of difficulty.
- A sample of my clothes that I make. To show fashion, my creativity and to make those in 200 years ponder on the design patterns and their meanings. Like a piece of art work, everyone will have a different opinion.
- £1000 worth of gold in a nugget. If someone found my time capsule in 200 years just think what a nice surprise that would be for someone. Everyone likes to find a little treasure sometimes and imagine the appre-

ciation in gold over 200 years... I would stamp it with "To the finder, everyone enjoys a little bonus, sparkle well!"

- A pair of Aussie bum boxer briefs. Simply because they are the best, sexiest ever made, also because my mum always said to have a clean pair of underwear on just in case... of what I do not know. But I would write this on a note and offer the opportunity of a clean pair of underwear to the finder in 200 years.

So those are my choices, I wouldn't like to explain them too much to the people finding them in 200 years. So that they can make their own thoughts on my items, I like to think that future "Time Team's" Phils, Tonys and Carensas will stand over the capsule and speculate. I hope their response will be one of joy and excitement with lots of hopping from foot to foot. It is a snapshot of me and my family/friends and life, love and interests as I think music/film/books etc will be recorded and survive.

For the future I hope that people won't worry about coming out, there won't be thought it could be a bad experience, just acceptance. The rest, well I hope to be holding hands with my husband for eternity.

Hope you've enjoyed, stay sparkley,  
Brightest Blessings,  
D-J

## A MALIBU OUTING

Hi, I'm D-J or as a lot of people now know me, it's Sparkles.

Believe it or not, I didn't come out to my friends or family till my 26th birthday (not that you'd think that now). Till that point I was a straight acting Narnian secretly partying with Mr. Tumnus, no one was any the wiser. Except dear old Mum-siewumsie.

When I was no longer around bad influence that kept me closeted through fear of horrid reprimands, I decided I was coming out no matter the many consequences I faced. Luckily my story is quite a funny one, I felt enormously freer and actually found that a gay friend had become the must have accessory to shop, party with and help straight friends pick up dates. Obviously there are still people who are very bigoted and I had my fair share of looks and comments. I soon adopted the outlook that if people didn't accept me for me, then are they a friend or worth being around in the first place.

Anyway, as I said, It was the day of my 26th birthday and had had a couple of drinks with my sister who had come down to visit our disabled mum. My sister was the first I told, I knew she'd be fine with it as she was into drama, acting and hung around with plenty of 'Sweetie Darlings' anyway. That was all I had planned for outing that day, my sister agreed to keep it to herself and took mum out so I'd have the evening free with my friends. My evening went well and after having drunk some more and being able to tell a friend why I'd turned down her advances last year (the real reasons), I felt lighter and lighter with every person I trusted to tell, it was like a drug. We all had a great laugh, sung to iconic gay songs, everyone suddenly decided they knew exactly who to pair me up with and everyone departed to "lets do shopping" (White Chicks style).

In the hour and a half between my friends leaving and my sister getting

home with mum, I had drunk the rest of a bottle of Malibu put on the pirate eye patch and hat my sister had bought me as a joke, being into pirates of the Caribbean, Johnny Depp, need I say more? (Oh yeah, they were also superglued to my head, well it was the only way to prevent them falling off and seemed like a brilliant Malibu idea, as "when would I ever want to take them off, Dah!). Finally I'd done some Hoovering/dancing to 'Dude Looks Like A Lady' by Aerosmith (Mrs Doubtfire, I know LMAO). Whilst I was still prancing about, finally allowing myself to listen out loud to the 'gay playlist' of songs I'd created, my sister had come upstairs after helping mum into bed downstairs and was in fits of laughter. We had a brief chat about what we'd been up to and when would be the best time to tell mum and the rest of the family now I'd let it slip to friends. I decided that there was no time like the present having become instantly camp, confident and apparently talking just like the queen from Blackadder. (Squiffy being the best word ever invented, this has been what is known in my circle as a 'Malibu camping'. Well it's a good excuse anyway ;))

So I was off to mum's room downstairs to tell her I'm gay, "OMG stop think what are you doing?" Too late I was bum shuffling it down the stairs (don't judge, you've all done it). Arriving outside my mum's room, my sister stops me and says there's something missing. "Oh no!" I thought, "My eye patch has fallen off again", whilst looking around for it on the floor, (No the fact one eye was still in pitch black wasn't a dead give away at first) no sooner had my sister said, "Arms up" did I have one of my mums dresses on, :s A shrug from me and a sniggering sister, I made my way into my mums room and climbed onto the end of her bed.

"Mumsie, I've got something to tell you," I started,

"Is it, what you have on?" she cackled. "Never mind that mum, you know

when you said to come tell you I have feelings for a girl”, (I’m presuming now so she could give me ‘The Talk’, at 26 a bit late for that, I chuckled) Well that’s never going to happen.”

“Well, why ever not?” She says with a sly smile.

“I like guys” I slurred.

“Oh that, I know that, me and your grandma knew that ages ago.”

Gob smacked! The cow she could have let me know, it would have saved years of hiding.

“Hang on how did you know?” I quizzed.

“Well, naming your cat Big Boy when you were younger was kind of a give away, then there were the tap lessons...”

We talked a bit more but she was cool with it. Not really sure how the rest of the night panned out but that was my Malibu Outing to my mum. 20 years of worry and she already Bloody knew!!

Telling my dad on the other hand was a lot briefer. I put off telling him for a couple of months, until my sister once again had come down to stay the weekend and reminded me that if I wanted my new relationship with dad to be a good one I had to let him know also (I hadn’t talked to him for 14 years previously). I could see her sense and arranged with her to get him to go out with us for a salad and I’d tell him after. She wished me luck as she went home in her car and I went with my dad in his car, the conversation was brief, but can be laughed at so much now. It went like this:-

“Dad I think I’ve found someone I really like and want to be around forever, they’re the one.”

“Oh great, that sounds brilliant,

what’s her name?”

“Ah...” There was a brief moment where I really thought about bottling it, but finally said, “It’s Andrew.”

There was a silence and a puzzled look I will never forget, at his brain trying to figure out how a girl had a boys name...

“But that’s a guys name?”

No softly softly approach here, tell him straight or it won’t sink in.

“Yeah dad, I like guys, I’m gay.”

“Oh, are you sure?”

I’m pretty certain this question always comes from dads not mums. Haha, are you sure, I thought na you know what it’s just dawned on me it was a 26 year faze. OK don’t be too sarcastic it’s a lot to take in for him.

“Yeah I’m pretty sure dad.”

Well at that we said no more and I walked the rest of the way home. Think he needed space, oh yeah, and time to ring my sister and ask her how long she’d known for and if she was sure I was doubly sure, Dads lol... Anyway we have a sweet relationship now and he has accepted me for who I am.

So that was my experience of coming out to my close friends and family, the effect Malibu has on me and the influence of a little sister when you tell her a secret. (I should have really learnt how she’d be after 21st birthday, tattoo, Malibu, toilet hugging and French maids outfit incident, but that’s another story).

I hope you’ve enjoyed reading my story and remember be you, the people that count will accept you no matter what.

Brightest Blessings, DJ

Ps Names in my coming out have been changed.

## THE HAPPY ENDING

Hi readers, Leon here! ♥

I want to tell you my story about being bi-sexual in prison. I came to prison in September 2012 and don't know when I'll be released. Coming to prison was a shock, and a scary place. I knew I couldn't be open about my sexuality due to the fear of being bullied so I kept myself locked away and didn't speak to anybody for 8 weeks. I felt lonely. On the 9th week, I came to a new prison and again it was a huge shock, people knew straight away I was bi, they would come to my door and boot it, call me a bum-boy and a gay c\*\*t! it became too much for me to handle and I tried killing myself 3 times. I was at a low and dark place. The chaplain "chere" moved me to a more relaxed wing, (which I am still

on).

Last year I became a new person! A lad called "C" ♥ moved on the wing, he is openly gay and doesn't care what other's say or think. Since I met "C" ♥ we hit it off straight away, we are close friends and soul mates. "C" has changed me from a timid boy to an openly Bi-sexual man ♥. "C" I love you loads and thank you for helping me. You're a special friend ♥ xxx

P.S: Being Bi/Gay in prison may be hard at first and others may bully you, but keep your head high and be open about your sexuality, Don't let the bullies win.

That's all for now!  
Love you all, Leon xxx

## PUZZLE - SUDOKU

					9		
		6			9		5
	8		4		5	2	
		7		5	3		2
5			7				3
	1	3	2				
4		1				6	
			6	3			9
	9					7	

All you have to do is in fill in all the squares so that each row, each column and each of the nine 3x3 squares contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

Answers at the back!

## WILL I EVER FIT IN?

I have only recently been comfortable to admit to myself that I am gay but I still find it hard to tell others. I have spoke with some friends in here who are gay and I have asked what it is like “outside” to be openly gay and to find someone. When they told me that most gay men just like a “bit of fun” it flattened me. I don’t mean that I want to fall in love with the first person I meet, I am still young(ish) at 32 but I am also a very loving and caring person with a lot to give. The thought of a one night stand whenever I

want for the rest of my life is not what I had in mind. I would love to find that special someone and settle down sooner rather than later. I want to feel that closeness to someone and be able to feel safe, secure, loved and be able to trust him. So is it true that all gay men who are younger are just interested in sex or do some of them want the same as me? Will I ever fit in?

By Richard.

Any replies welcome

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### SONNET FOR A SHY BOY

*By Matthew*

Resting in the window of a corner café  
Gazing as you walk on by  
It seems you wanna glance my way  
You can't deny boy  
You're such a shy boy  
Handsome you seem to be  
Your tongue's too knotted  
To say hi to me  
Most guys advertise  
By making eyes and telling lies  
Your hopes and dreams could come true  
Babe, all you gotta do is ask me to  
Some men act too sure  
Maybe you're thinking less is more  
Wear the mask, it's all okay.

## WILL I FIND LOVE?

I am writing this as a current serving prisoner due for release in a few months. To get straight to the point I was convicted of a sexual offense after talking to someone on the internet who told me he was seventeen but later turned out to be fourteen. I was in a straight relationship for years but it came to a time where I could no longer ignore my true feelings. I turned to the internet to talk to someone to try and prove to myself that I was not gay and that maybe I was just going through some type of crisis. When I found out the person's age that I was talking to, my world fell apart. I could only see one way out but I chose not to. Instead I fought the system and lost. Even after my trial I struggled to admit to myself and others that I was gay, how could this be? I have a family. I even went to mental health because I thought that I had gone mad. Then one day I sat down and thought back and sieved through my suppressed memories. It all came flooding back to me, memories as far back as high school when I would look at other lads in my year in a way that other people didn't, males catching my eye when I was out. When I was asked why I was looking at them by whoever I was with I would make up the excuse of "oh I thought I recognised him from somewhere". I had got caught up in what was and what wasn't socially acceptable in the area I lived and friends that I surrounded

myself with and I walked the "normal" pathway of life. Don't get me wrong, I am not making excuses or telling a sob story. Choosing to talk to someone on the internet was the biggest mistake of my life and the biggest regret by far. It has caused so much heartache to those who love me and has left me feeling that my life is over and I will never find love. I feel as though I have so much to give to that right person but I fear that when I do meet my "Mr Right" and I tell him my past that he will run for the hills. I have no choice of keeping this a secret, I have to by law disclose to any new partner what I was convicted of and I am not ashamed to say that I am scared of the reaction that I will get even though I have always maintained my innocence. So if you met me at a bar one night in town, a thirty two year old twink looking male with slim build, semi toned body, brown hair and blue eyes and we got talking and I disclosed my past to you how would you react? Would you carry on talking to me and give me a chance? Would you even entertain being in a relationship? Or would you turn and walk away? What will happen if I find my "Mr Right"? Will I find love and my happily ever after? Or will I be destined to live a long, lonely, loveless life?

From Anonymous

## **PERSONAL HELL**

*By Matthew*

I've heard people say I'm in my own personal hell,  
But never really understood til now.  
Sitting locked away in my 10 x 4 cell,  
I sit wonder, yell, How!!

A place deprived of love, hope and joy,  
A place I never thought I'd be.  
A place where you feel like nothing but a BOY!  
A place where you're stripped of your glee.

When I look around all I can see are bolts and bars,  
A place where I'm locked away.  
In comparison life would be better on Mars,  
But no, in this hell I sit day after day.  
Stripped of your name,  
nothing left but an empty shell.  
No-one but myself to blame,  
Whilst sitting here in my own personal hell.

One day they'll shout for me,  
I'll slightly raise my head.  
And they'll say today's the day you're FREE,  
I'll be out of this hell,  
I'll be able to be ME!!  
From the rooftops 'I'm FREE' 'I'm FREE'  
I'll yell.

## SCARS

By Thomas

We're not so different, you and I.  
Perhaps that's why you caught my eye.  
Two halves of a whole, in some strange way,  
Becoming my sunshine, my bright ray.  
Share the burden, lighten the load,  
I'll help you along the beaten road.  
But who am I to try and understand?  
Have I not suffered in my life so bland?  
Alas my worries aren't to be seen,  
They lurk within me, cunning and mean.  
Wear the mask, it's all okay.  
Return to fight another day.  
My strength, my rock, my safest place,  
Help me through to the end of this race.  
Tear down the walls, throw open the doors,  
Take my scars and I'll take yours.

## PUZZLE - LINK WORD

For each of the word pairs listed, find the four letter word which can be placed after the first and before the second word to make two new words or phrases.

Enter your answers in the grid and unscramble the shaded letters to reveal a winter vehicle.

Vehicle: \_\_\_\_\_

Answers last page!

**PENALTY**

**EIDER**

**KETTLE**

**GINGER**

**TAIL**

**SUIT**

**QUICK**

**CLOCK**

**BEAUTY**

**CHICKEN**


**BOXING**

**POUR**

**ROLL**

**BARREL**

**DOCTOR**

**LOAD**

**CORDIAL**

**BENCH**

**CHECK**

**BACK**



## DEAR BENT BARS

February is the month of GAYNESS, in this place. The L.G.B.T. month is for getting people to come up with ideas for a few who were shouting abuse, but who have actually asked me how I do it, proud to come out and be counted as a person, instead of an outcast, I just tell them this

BE HAPPY WITH  
WHO YOU ARE  
WHAT YOU ARE

and WHAT YOU WANT TO BE

My advice is, those who shout abuse at you for being LGBT are the ones that aren't comfortable with their own SEXUALITY and are afraid. What do you say?

Write again soon,

Barrie

### BEING ME

*By Barrie*

I may be gay, have an odd build  
I may be not smart, nor have a guild  
I may be sad and down at times  
And sorry that I done my crimes

I may be tall, and not so bright  
But at least I am happy to admit  
That BEING ME, because I'm gay  
Am happy, and full of wit

People call me the silliest names  
And expect a response, to play their games  
They think it's good, and oh so cool  
But being me, to me, they are just a fool

So here it is, to those I say  
I AM OUT, I AM PROUD  
I AM GAY and I AM LOUD.

What is it, they're trying to hide?  
By being mean, I think they're snide.  
Sometimes it's "OH WHAT THE HELL"  
Maybe in their life, all's not well

## MY ONLY TRUE FRIEND

*By Matthew*

You don't listen to me  
I talk to you  
And you talk to me  
but you don't listen  
You show me things  
that have no real meaning  
You show me joy & wonder  
laughter & fear.  
I scream & shout  
I answer most of your questions  
I even get some right  
You are my love, my only true friend  
So why am I ignored  
Oh why don't you listen  
Do you love me?  
Do you really care?  
I do everything for you  
I turn you on  
I turn you over  
Make sure you're clean  
Oh I think I've worked it out  
I bet I know the answer  
Is it because ...  
... You're my TV.

**Most people think that the first lesbian kiss seen on television in the UK was on *Brookside* in 1994. Actually, the first lesbian kiss seen on television was in 1974 on BBC2, between Alison Steadman and Myra Frances - two actors on a program called *Girl*. The first gay kiss between two men on television was broadcast in 1979 on BBC1 in *Coming Out*.**



## DEAR BENT BARS

Dear Bent Bars:

I wrote this about a friend who passed away last year. And like the poem says (The power of friendship you have given me), he inspired me to be true to myself and to always put other people's feelings before my own. My whole family was very supportive of me when I came out them when I was 13 years old. I know that is a young age to tell your mam that you are gay and at the

back of my mind I thought she was going to disown me. But instead she said that she is proud of me no matter what life decisions I make. Then she said something that made me laugh. She said, "If you have any problems, speak to your brother." I would like to end this by saying a big THANK YOU to Bent Bars for listening to what I have to say.

From Duane

### Friendship *By Duane*

As we grow up, we learn that even the one person that wasn't supposed to let you down probably will. You'll have your heart broken probably more than once and it's harder every time. You'll break hearts too, so remember how it felt when yours was broken. You'll fight with you best friend, you'll blame a new love for things that an old one did. You'll cry because time is passing to fast, and you'll eventually lose someone you love. So take too many pictures, laugh too much, and love like you've never been hurt, because every sixty seconds you spend upset is a minute of happiness you'll never get back. A ball is a circle with no beginning and no end; it keeps us together like our circle of friends. But the treasure inside for us to see is the power of friendship you have given me.

# IMAGINING THE FUTURE: TIME CAPSULE

If I were to bury a time capsule and had to choose five items to place into it, they would be as follows:

- Picture of myself
- A compilation CD of current music
- An up to date mobile phone
- A picture of the area that the time capsule is buried in
- A picture of our current monarch Queen Elizabeth II

I would place these items in the capsule because:

- Picture of myself: I would put this in the capsule because then the person who has found it and dug it up can see what the person who buried it looks like, and can feel a sort of connection with me.
- A compilation CD of current music: I would put an up to date compilation CD in the capsule because then those in the future are able to listen to music that was around in the past and what kind of style it was, and how it differs to their music.
- An up to date mobile phone: I would place this item in the capsule because they will be able to

see how technology has advanced over the years, and how basic ours was compared to theirs.

- A picture of the area: I would put a couple pictures of the area the capsule is buried in, because if the area has changed dramatically over the years then they can see what it was like and what was there, after all it is part of their history.
- A picture of our current monarch: I would choose to put this item in because the monarchy is important to British society and our current Monarch Queen Elizabeth II has done some wonders and has achieved some great things in her term of reign and this would be good for them to know as again it is a part of their past.

Alongside this I would put some picture in there that I thought might be relevant like pioneers who have revolutionized music, other monarchs, or religious head figures, and the seven wonders of the world and this will help them to see what was around and compare them to what is around in their day.

by Matt



**A Bent Bars mix CD would include George Michael - Outside, Janelle Monae - Make Me Feel, Elton John - Tiny Dancer, Madonna - Vogue, Sylvester - You Make Me Feel... what would you put?**

# PUZZLE - STEPLADDER

D R O P
T E A R

Your task here is to climb from TEAR to DROP changing just one letter at a time and without disturbing the order of the remaining letters. We've clued the five stages you take, but not in the correct order. Can you climb the ladder successfully?

Clues:

- Bus running on tracks
- Journey
- Sports side
- Slower leak
- Quick haircut

Answers at the back!

## You Give Me Hope

*By Barrie*

You give me hope, you give me love  
You give me strength and hope  
You give me understanding and guidance  
And many ways to manage and cope.

I give to you, all I have  
I give to you, everything I love dear  
I give to you, all the above  
And everything and the hope you'll stay near.

## DEAR BENT BARS

Having been a L.G.B.T. rep for many years I have come across and dealt with loads of issues for prisoners who are L.G.B.T. and non-L.G.B.T., on a wide range of areas which sometimes I've resolved by mediation between people. I've recently had to deal with people who have mental health issues and learning difficulties as well as having physical disabilities. They have also found it difficult to speak to healthcare staff for contraceptives due to being targeted by non-L.G.B.T. prisoners and due to the stigma they face by their peers. And pressured into helping the other prisoners for protection against bullies.

Prisoners who are L.G.B.T., I would urge them to make the first step to approaching the wing based Equality Officer and wing based Disability Liaison Officer. They could also approach a manager which would be a wing manager or custodial manager, who

would have confidential meeting. You only need a Wing Application for this.

With prisoners who are transgender it's totally important that you speak to your O.M.U. Officer (who are now known as Specialist officers) they should stay with you on your journey without changing officers as this works in prisons. And there is no catch up as the officer attends all case conferences and inputs to a Care Plan Support Plan that you'll need. But you have to be honest to O.M.U. all the way for the help.

It's also important that you don't let others judge you for who you are, they're the ones with their insecurity and they are probably struggling with their identity themselves.

Well I will close for now. Take care,  
Kimberley

### JUST SO YOU KNOW...

The Bent Bars Collective aims to include the contributions we receive as they are submitted without making significant editorial changes to content or style (beyond spelling and grammar corrections when necessary). However, due to space constraints some articles are edited for length or clarity. We also sometimes edit content for privacy and confidentiality reasons. If you've sent something in and it hasn't appeared don't be shy to write and make sure we received it!

We will not publish any material which reinforces stereotypes or expresses oppressive attitudes toward others. The articles in this newsletter are written by people in prison and it is read by people inside and outside prison.

Distribution is free so if you'd like a copy, just ask! We welcome all your thoughts, comments and replies to questions raised in these pages.

# PUZZLE ANSWERS

## SUDOKU

2	4	5	3	7	1	9	6	8
1	7	6	8	2	9	3	4	5
3	8	9	4	6	5	2	7	1
9	6	7	1	5	3	8	2	4
5	2	4	7	9	8	1	3	6
8	1	3	2	4	6	5	9	7
4	3	1	9	8	7	6	5	2
7	5	8	6	3	2	4	1	9
6	9	2	5	1	4	7	8	3

## LINK WORD

PENALTY	K	I	C	K	BOXING
EIDER	D	O	W	N	POUR
KETTLE	D	R	U	M	ROLL
GINGER	B	E	E	R	BARREL
TAIL	S	P	I	N	DOCTOR
SUIT	C	A	S	E	LOAD
QUICK	L	I	M	E	CORDIAL
CLOCK	W	O	R	K	BENCH
BEAUTY	S	P	O	T	CHECK
CHICKEN	F	E	E	D	BACK

VEHICLE: SNOW MOBILE

## TAKE FIVE

<sup>1</sup> F	I	<sup>2</sup> E	L	<sup>3</sup> D
I		N		I
<sup>2</sup> E	N	T	E	R
L		E		G
<sup>3</sup> D	I	R	G	E

## STEPLADDER

D R O P
D R I P
T R I P
T R I M
T R A M
T E A M
T E A R

# CALL OUT FOR THE NEXT NEWSLETTER!

## “CELEBRATION”

The theme for the next issue is **CELEBRATION**. What do you celebrate? How do you celebrate it? What do you think is worth celebrating? What do you hope to celebrate in the future? What do you wish had been celebrated in your life or in the world? We would love to hear from you with anything you want included in the next newsletter, even if it's on another topic.

You can send us stories, letters, poetry, drawings, cartoons, anything that we can print (we can send any original artworks back to you after making a copy). Please make sure to let us know with your submission what name you would it to be published under.

How to contact us:

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**London, WC1A 9BF**

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[bentbarsproject.org](http://bentbarsproject.org)

The Bent Bars Project is a letter writing program that connects lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, gender-variant, intersex, and queer communities across prison walls. If you would like more information or would like to request a penpal, please drop us a line.



Feel free to pass this newsletter on to anyone else who might be interested.