

Blacks on Blacks

What's in a Name?

Gatere. Madeje. Nyajeka. Omolo. Chimombe.

Beautiful names from the land where Humankind was first given Life. Beautiful names that connect the Sons and Daughters of Afrika to a glorious history of unprecedented splendour. Beautiful names that proclaim to all, 'Yes! I am an Afrikan!' Beautiful names for a Beautiful people.

I too am a child of Mother Afrika...so how did I come to be CURSED with the last name 'Burchall'?

I did some research on my name and found that the original Burchalls were a white English family who owned many slaves, one of whom was my Bermudian ancestor. Upon Emancipation on August 1, 1834, the newly 'freed' (how 'free' can one be without any economic foundation upon which to stand, independent of white 'assistance?') Afrikans often claimed the names of their former owners.

The institution of slavery sought, among other things, to break the defiant spirit of Afrika by renaming her seed. Thus, Kofi became 'Tom, property of Mr. Wyse,' Binta became 'Sally, property of Mr. Smith,' and, Yero became 'George, property of Mr. Williams.' This is the process through which I came to have the last name 'Burchall.' My ancestors were denied the right to read, write, speak in their original language, and call themselves by their original names. Over a period of many generations, this forced amnesia resulted in a very substantial weakening of the cultural lifeline which kept us linked to the Motherland.

Enslaved Afrikans, living as prisoners in the so-called 'new' world, battled valiantly to maintain a firm hold upon their culture through various ingenious means; however, due to the disjointed, schizophrenic life that they were forced to lead, some crucial cultural ingredients were lost in the interest of survival. Original names were not uttered for fear of death. We were given these white names and we took them because we wanted our progeny to survive.

Fast forward to March, 1996. Here I am, a young Brother of undeniably Afrikan ancestry, speaking the queen's English, with the last name of some white family in England. The footprints made by my original line in the sands of history have been all but erased by the hostile winds of white racism. Am I Akan? Or Yoruba? Or Fulani? Or Mandinka? I will never know. Such is the lingering legacy of the pale-skinned savages who invaded our homeland, brandishing their bibles and their guns and forever changed our tomorrows.

Although the institution of physical slavery was shelved over a century ago in favour of a kinder, gentler, and more economically viable form of racial oppression (called 'integration'), the deep scars left on the backs and minds of my ancestors are still being felt today.

My slave name — 'Burchall' — stands as a tragic testament to this reality.

COLWYN BURCHALL

Remembering Nahaman Lopez

Injustice for the street children of Latin America

"In their little worlds in which children have their existence, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt, as injustice."
— Charles Dickens, "Great Expectations"

Nahaman Lopez would have been 19 years old this year. It is an age when most of us here in Canada are entering adulthood — anxious, but full of hope. For the street children of Latin America, reaching the age of nineteen is a battle in itself. The ones that graduate to adulthood are the "lucky" ones. Nahaman Lopez was not one of them. He never made it to his fourteenth birthday. Nahaman died in a Guatemala City hospital with six broken ribs, bruising on over 60% of his body, and a burst liver.

On March 14, 1990, Nahaman and a group of other street children were sniffing glue on a street corner. Four uniformed police officers caught the boys and began

to punish them by pouring the glue in their eyes and hair. When Nahaman resisted, he was thrown to the ground and beaten. Ten days later, he was buried. His gravestone reads "I just wanted to be a kid, but they wouldn't let me."

There are an estimated 100 million street children worldwide, 40 million in Latin America alone. Many are escaping abusive homes. Others have been orphaned by war, or abandoned due to extreme poverty. Once on the streets, they fall into a world of perpetual nightmare. Theft and prostitution become their means of survival. To escape the unbearable hunger and cold, most become dependent on cheap inhalants.

One more factor truly completes their nightmare — constant fear. The street children of Latin America were abused, tortured, raped, and even killed. Unbelievably, it is often by the very men who should be protecting

them. In 1990, Casa Alianza, a nonprofit organization dedicated to bettering the lives of street children, started offering legal aid services. Since then, they have initiated 250 cases against members of Guatemala's State security apparatus and private policemen. In Nahaman's case, thanks to their perseverance, the four policemen responsible were sentenced to 12 years each.

More often than not, however, justice has gone unserved. Take the case of Marvin Oswaldo. He was 12 when a National Policeman allegedly caught him stealing a pair of sunglasses. The policeman locked Marvin in his left arm, put his gun to the boy's head, and shot him dead. The judge gave the officer a three year suspended sentence. He was able to pay it off in a fine equivalent to approximately \$31 US per year.

This Thursday, the staff of Casa Alianza are going to erect a

sign on the very street corner where Nahaman was beaten. They will be remembering not only him, but Marv and all of the other children who have fallen victim to a system which values their lives at almost nothing. The memory of these children helps the workers of Casa Alianza persevere in their struggle.

The organization's main objective is to let the children be heard. Not to speak for them, but to empower the children to speak for themselves. For this to work, however, the world has to start listening. Even from beyond the grave, Nahaman Lopez's voice, tragic and touching, is trying to reach us.

Indifference is the greatest killer of street children. You can help, starting by checking out Casa Alianza's homepage (<http://magi.com/crica/casalnz.html>). If you are interested in being part of an awareness group here in Halifax, e-mail me at jdevine@is.dal.ca.

JENNA DEVINE

Spring ain't no fun either

The telling and tumultuous tale of a tired and tormented twit

Well, it appears we have finally come to the end of the infamous February blahs and are about to embark on the optimistic rites of spring. But before I dive too deeply into a whirlwind of colloquialisms, allow me one simple question: are we supposed to feel better now?

We have all been informed

(probably more often than we care to remember) that all the troubles staring at us in the bleak face of winter will quickly retreat with the introduction of a friendlier season. If this is true, and we are encouraged to believe that it is not only true but imminent, I am still waiting to hear exactly who it is that is about to step into my life

and write those eight essays, read those twelve novels, and ace those four exams.

Sure, it is conceivable that the coming of a warmer season will magically invigorate me, and I will suddenly be able to tackle what has seemed to be an impossible work load for the past six months. I have a feeling, however, that this

is just about as likely as the Dalhousie football team bringing home the Vanier cup...go figure.

It hasn't been all bad. I can recall a time in the not-too-distant past when I was actually inspired by a lecture, even excited — if not downright ecstatic — about a reading; and, although this one sounds a little far-fetched, even enthusiastic about a paper. Yet, I also recall quickly finishing that cup of coffee and returning to real life. And at the end of the day, the story is sadly the same: the silly work load is still staring me in the face, and the days are getting fewer, and it sure ain't gettin' any easier.

Perhaps these are thoughts that would be more appropriately stored in the confines of a letter or journal, maybe even in the personal security of a diary. Be that as it may, I have an inkling that I'm not the only one out there who is dealing with these seemingly insurmountable tasks. I also realize that I'm not the only one to recognize that come April, the work will somehow be done, the anxiety will magically subside, and the wine will once again flow freely. But in the meantime, will you please stop suggesting that the coming of March is going to somehow carry all of my problems away!

I happen to believe that misery and procrastination-to-a-ridiculous-extent are a genuine part of the university experience, and often happen to find myself revelling in this perpetual state of self-mockery. So what is the moral of this pathetic groan of a tale, you ask? Well, at the risk of offending those that I have managed to drag with me thus far down this long and very winding road, I would venture to suggest that you keep your clichés to yourself, your head in the books, and last but certainly not least, your corkscrew within an arm's reach. It'll all be over soon.

MATTHEW COHEN

Step on the gas, Halifax

Driving in Halifax is like attending a rhinoceros convention — everybody is docile and friendly, but they refuse to move their asses. I've stopped honking my horn, because like Beethoven's 7th, 8th, and 9th symphonies, it falls on deaf ears.

Don't get me wrong, I love Halifax, and am quite content to live here until I finish my education, and even beyond. When I moved here from Toronto, I was told that rule number one is, "Never start a sentence with 'In Toronto, we...'" Well, I feel I'm going to have to break that rule.

In Toronto, we have world's most fucked up traffic. But at least it's fun. It's the only city I've ever seen with traffic jams at 2 a.m., where you're never allowed to park anywhere, and where people have been known to drive naked. That last one is not too common, but I have seen it twice.

In Halifax, anybody and everybody will let you in, but it takes all the challenge out of driving. I haven't once raced a guy out of a red light hoping to beat him to the row of parked cars. It's no fun. But with any luck, I'll get used to driving in this town. In many respects I'm already there. I no longer honk my horn, drive 80 km/h down a side street, and I haven't once revved my engine over 6000 rpm...well, maybe once.

Friday and Saturday night on Young St. in Toronto is like rush hour. Thousands of cars of every shape and size — from neon Sprints that bounce up and down to the most uniform white Hyundai Excel — crawl up the street at a snail's pace. They take in the city, the atmosphere, listen

to music, and just check things out.

Halifax is a much more vibrant city, but in a very different fashion. The bars, the clubs, and the parties are much more individual. Toronto really only developed its modern-day street atmosphere after the Blue Jays won the World Series — one million people streamed into the streets after Joe Carter knocked the crap out of a ball and sent it over the left field fence.

I really only have one problem with Halifax — I haven't found one decent bagel shop. Don't tell me Bagel Works because I'm looking for a real Jewish bagel, not that New York crap. So, if you find one...let me know.

DANIEL CLARK

GAZETTE ELECTIONS

Nominations for the positions of: Managing Editor of the Dalhousie Gazette and Copy Editor of the Dalhousie Gazette for the 1996-97 publishing year are now open. **If you are currently a Dalhousie student, then you are eligible to run for either of these positions.** If you are interested in running for either position, please submit a signed letter of intent to run to: Jen Horsey or Sam McCaig before March 15 at 5 p.m. **For more info, contact Jen Horsey at 494-2507, or at the Dalhousie Gazette, 3rd floor, rm. 312, SUB.**