

**'guest commentary'**

by Janice Covington, Charlotte, N.C.

**The easy way out?**

Prostitution is on the rise in our community, especially among our transgender brothers and sisters. Some say that participation in prostitution for a transgender person or a gay man hustling is the easy way out. I beg to differ.

The primary reason for participating in prostitution, for many who do, is for food, a place to live or just plain survival. Our sisters and brothers are putting themselves in harm's way because our country will not give us our rights as American citizens to have a job without discrimination and to earn a decent living. Instead, some LGBT people are forced to turn to working the streets, bars or escort services, exchanging their health and STD risk for food, stability, clothing and roofs over their heads.

Some LGBT people would rather commit suicide than turn to prostitution.

This is not much of a life, huh? I was a transgender prostitute in 1969 in San Francisco and 1970 in Chicago; so you see, I'm not just talking theory and thought. I speak from experience.

Yes, I had to sleep on park benches, in hotel lobbies and, yes, in a man's bed — just to be warm. I'm not ashamed to tell the truth about my past; I can't change it. This is why I can relate to my sisters who are prostitutes and the gay men who have to hustle. I can attest first hand and understand why prostitution is a part of survival in our community.

We deserve a chance to obtain employment without discrimination. I believe it's our birth right. I believe that right is protected by the Constitution and Bill of Rights. LGBT people are a proud, educated people who can contribute to society, if only given the chance.

These rights have been twisted into chaos

to suit the bigots and the religious right, like the FIRE Church of Concord, N.C. and the American Family Association. They influence our lawmakers to reject any rights we might lobby for. These so-called Christians, in the name of God, only want to eradicate us like a plague. This is why the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) is so crucial to our existence. ENDA must pass in 2009.

In the fall of 2007, a congressional subcommittee led by Congressman Barney Frank and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi did nothing but play games with our lives by approving an inadequate package that left the transgender community destined for the slaughterhouse. I was assured by Joe Solmonese, HRC president, in a private meeting held in February in Charlotte that we will not be left out in the next round of negotiations. At the time, he assured me that HRC will only lobby for a full and inclusive ENDA. This March, the HRC Board of Governors and Board of Directors also voted to move forward with support for a full and inclusive ENDA. Just recently, HRC posted this commitment on their national website.

In closing, I hope and pray that we will be victorious for the sake of all of us — so that we do not have to resort to prostitution and suicide, so that we can prosper in society to provide for ourselves without depending on government aid or others. We deserve a car in every garage and a chicken in every pot. ■

— Originally published on Q-Notes' community blog at [blog.q-notes.com](http://blog.q-notes.com).

Q-Notes strives to provide the Carolinas LGBT community with an open forum for discussion and commentary. The views of guest commentators do not necessarily represent the official views or positions of Q-Notes, its editorial staff or publisher.

**Sister says brother is a victim of hate crime**

from page 1

"If he saw you walking down the street and you needed something, he would give it to you," she said. "He always had a smile on his face where ever he went."

Jimmy was also active and involved in the community, she said. He volunteered with Operation Sickle Cell in Fayetteville.

By press time Fayetteville Police Public Information Officer Theresa Chance had yet to respond to several phone calls seeking more information about the case; it is not known whether investigators have any leads or any suspects.

Sadly, McCollough's murder came only hours before jury selection began in a high profile murder case of a teenage transgender woman in Greeley, Colo. In that state, prosecutors were able to use a transgender-inclusive hate crimes statute against defendant Allen Andrade; it marked the first time in the nation a murder case used hate crimes legislation to prosecute the killing of a transgender victim.

On April 23, just as Q-Notes was wrapping up production on this issue, a jury convicted Andrade of first-degree murder. North

Carolina has no similar hate crimes legislation that includes sexual orientation or gender-identity and expression.

Ian Palmquist, executive director of the statewide LGBT advocacy group EqualityNC, said in a statement on April 20 that McCollough's murder was another reminder that anti-gay and anti-transgender violence still exists in North Carolina.

"While we don't yet know whether this death was a hate crime, we do know that our state laws fail to recognize the possibility of hate crime based on sexual orientation and gender identity," Palmquist said. "It's long past time for those categories to be added to our state's existing hate crime law."

He added, "Our condolences go out to Jimmy's family and friends. We call on local police to fully investigate this crime."

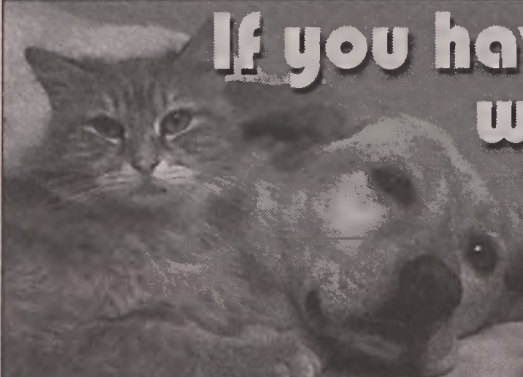
Anyone with information or tips regarding this investigation is encouraged to contact the Fayetteville Police Department Homicide Investigation Unit at 910-433-1856 or call Crime Stoppers at 910-483-TIPS (910-483-8477). ■



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