

= Brian Williamson =

Brian Williamson ( 4 September 1945 ? 9 June 2004 ) was a Jamaican gay rights activist who co @-@ founded the Jamaica Forum for Lesbians , All @-@ Sexuals and Gays ( J @-@ FLAG ) . He was known for being one of the earliest openly gay men in Jamaican society and for being one of its best known gay rights activists .

Born to an upper @-@ middle @-@ class family in Saint Ann Parish , Williamson initially considered a life in the Roman Catholic clergy before deciding to devote himself to the cause of gay rights in Jamaica . In the 1990s , he purchased an apartment building in the New Kingston area of Kingston , in which he established a gay nightclub , which remained open for two years despite opposition from police . In 1998 , he co @-@ founded J @-@ FLAG with other lesbian , gay , bisexual , and transgender ( LGBT ) rights activists , soon becoming the public face of the organisation . As J @-@ FLAG 's representative , he argued in favour of LGBT rights during appearances on Jamaican television and radio programs . This attracted great hostility within Jamaica ? a country with particularly high rates of anti @-@ gay prejudice ? with J @-@ FLAG members receiving death threats and Williamson surviving a knife attack . For a time he left Jamaica , living in Canada and England for several years , before returning to Kingston in 2002 .

In June 2004 , Williamson was murdered in his apartment by an acquaintance , Dwight Hayden , whom he had been aiding with financial handouts . Police believed that Hayden 's motive was robbery , although J @-@ FLAG also suggested that homophobia may have played a part in the killing . Hayden was subsequently sentenced to life in prison . Upon learning of the murder , a crowd assembled in New Kingston to celebrate Williamson 's death , chanting homophobic slogans and lyrics . Conversely , the Jamaican LGBT community held a secret memorial for him , while protests against the killing were held by LGBT rights groups in the United Kingdom .

= = Biography = =

Williamson was born to an upper @-@ middle @-@ class family in the rural Saint Ann Parish . He initially considered joining the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church , studying for this position in Montego Bay , but eventually decided against this . In 1979 , he began to devote himself to the cause of gay rights in Jamaica , becoming the first individual to do so in such a public manner . Jamaica had a reputation for its widespread anti @-@ gay prejudice , an attitude that pervaded public discourse at all levels of society , with a number of popular Jamaican musicians inciting violence against gay men in their lyrics . Initially , Williamson offered his apartment in Kingston as a space in which gay Jamaicans could meet roughly every fortnight . In the early 1990s he purchased a large property on New Kingston 's gentrified Haughton Street , converting part of this building into a gay nightclub that he called Entourage . Many of those who attended the club worked in the city 's foreign embassies . Although the police tried to close it down , the club remained open for two years until Williamson was attacked by a patron carrying a knife , which was used to slash Williamson 's arm . Although same @-@ sex sexual relations between men were illegal in Jamaica , Williamson was openly gay .

Williamson and other members of Jamaica 's lesbian , gay , bisexual , and transgender ( LGBT ) community decided to form an organisation to campaign for their rights , resulting in the establishment of the Jamaica Forum for Lesbians , All Sexuals , and Gays ( J @-@ FLAG ) in December 1998 . J @-@ FLAG sought to enhance LGBT rights through advocacy and encouraging legal reform , as well as through educational and social service programs . They also kept a record of anti @-@ LGBT hate crimes including assaults , home invasions , and the corrective rape of lesbians , further recording the murder of 30 gay men between 1997 and 2004 . From the time of the group 's foundation , its members were subjected to repeated death threats . Williamson became the public face of the group , appearing on radio talk shows and television shows such as Perspective and Nationwide in which he argued against homophobia and called for greater government investment to tackle the HIV / AIDS pandemic . Unlike most other LGBT rights activists in Jamaica , Williamson did not seek to protect himself by using a pseudonym , disguising his voice , or hiding his

appearance . Facing hostility and threats of violence , Williamson left Jamaica and moved to Canada and then England , before returning to the island in 2002 . There , he moved into an apartment in his Haughton Street compound and decided to take a renewed role within Jamaica 's LGBT rights movement . He lived in one room of his apartment block and rented out a number of others .

= = Murder = =

Financially affluent , Williamson would often offer money or odd jobs to his acquaintances in the LGBT community . Among those whom Williamson befriended was Dwight Hayden , a closeted gay man in his mid @-@ 20s who had been a user of crack cocaine prior to 2002 and who was known locally as " Dog " and " Swong " . They met in New Kingston and Williamson helped Hayden out by purchasing newspapers which he could then sell on the streets . According to one of Williamson 's flatmates , Desmond Chambers , " I have seen [ Hayden ] here about six times ( and ) anything him want , Brian give him . Brian give him money , Brian give him food and help him to purchase ( newspaper ) to sell on the road . " On 7 June 2004 Hayden arrived at Williamson 's flat with another man , with Williamson welcoming them in and offering them bottles of Guinness . Hayden asked for money from Williamson , who agreed he would give it to him later in the evening . At this , Hayden attacked Williamson , stabbing him around seventy times .

Williamson 's body was discovered by Chambers at approximately 11.15am. Chambers noticed that the air conditioning had been left on , something that Williamson was unlikely to have done , and then realised that Williamson 's bedroom door had been left ajar . Investigating further , he opened the door and discovered Williamson 's corpse lying face down on the floor , with multiple stab wounds to the neck and surrounded by a pool of blood . Williamson 's dog , Tessa , was running about in the room and barking .

The scene of the crime was visited by Father Michael Lewis of the Stella Maris Church , who was accompanied by Williamson 's sister Gradryn Williams ; she was convinced not to look at the body by Williamson 's friends . Crowds assembled outside the apartment block , made up of individuals who were laughing and celebrating Williamson 's death . Some of the assembled people shouted out statements such as " This is long overdue " , " Battyman he get killed " , " Let 's get them one at a time " , " That 's what you get for sin " , and " Batty man fi dead ! " ( " Faggots should die ! " ) . Others sang " Boom Bye Bye " , a line from a dancehall song by Buju Banton that discusses shooting and burning gay men . Rebecca Schleifer , a Human Rights Watch ( HRW ) researcher , had a meeting with Williamson planned for that day , and arrived at his home to find the assembled crowd ; she noted that " It was like a parade . They were basically partying " .

= = = Police investigation and conviction = = =

Police issued a statement declaring that they were searching for two men whom Chambers had observed at Williamson 's apartment prior to his death . Corporal Devon Hugh Williams of the Constabulary Communication Network ( CCN ) informed press that the police suspected that the motive of the attack had been robbery , as evidence pointing to the fact that Williamson 's apartment had been ransacked and a safe removed . However , both friends of Williamson and human rights organisations suggested that ? given Williamson 's status as an openly gay man ? robbery might have been a secondary issue , with homophobia being the main motive behind the crime . J @-@ FLAG expressed its suspicion that the killing was a " hate @-@ related crime " , articulating the view that Williamson had been killed because he was a publicly visible gay man . Amnesty International urged police not to dismiss alternative possible motives . Amnesty 's Piers Bannister informed press that " We do know that there 's a high level of homophobia in Jamaica , so there was a possibility that it was a hate crime . Many hate crime victims are robbed afterward . We 're not saying it wasn 't a robbery ; we just want a full investigation . " Schleifer publicly stated that it is " really important to investigate [ the crime ] thoroughly . Because there are really strong indications that it might have been a homophobic attack " .

On June 11 , two days after the murder , police arrested their suspect . Hayden provided a confession and subsequently pleaded guilty in court . Hayden 's legal representative , Randolph Williams , urged the judge to show leniency because the suspect had shown remorse for his crime from the moment of his arrest . The judge , Justice Basil Reid , sentenced Hayden to life in prison with the possibility of parole after fifteen years .

= = Reaction = =

After his death , the Jamaica Observer described Williamson as " Jamaica 's most prominent gay rights activist " , while both the BBC and The Independent called him the country 's " best @-@ known gay rights activist " , and Gary Younge of The Guardian termed him " the public face of gay rights in the country " .

Tony Hadn , a volunteer for J @-@ FLAG , stated that Williamson was " so courageous . He never stopped to think , ' oh , I might get in trouble for this , ' so in that sense he was very selfless . " He was succeeded as J @-@ FLAG 's leader by Gareth Williams , who informed press that Williamson " was the only out gay person in Jamaica who had the courage to put his face on television , I was very close to him ... His murder was really a traumatic loss for our community . " One member of J @-@ FLAG stated that " Brian Williamson is our Martin Luther King " . Four days later , J @-@ FLAG held a memorial devoted to Williamson , which was attended by almost two hundred people ; the memorial involved personal tributes , poetry slams , and lip synching to Whitney Houston songs .

On 23 June , the British LGBT rights group OutRage ! held a memorial vigil outside the High Commission of Jamaica in London . OutRage ! leader Peter Tatchell attended the vigil , there proclaiming that the Jamaican Prime Minister , P. J. Patterson , " shares responsibility for the wave of homophobic violence , culminating in the murder of Brian Williamson " because he had failed to decriminalize same @-@ sex sexual activity and clamp down on homophobic violence in Jamaican society . Also in attendance at the vigil were the Green Party 's London Assembly member Darren Johnson , Amnesty International 's Carol Budd , Big Up 's Charles Anglin , UKBlackOut 's Andrew Prince , and the Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group 's Barry O 'Leary . The London Gay Men 's Chorus attended , singing a rendition of " Let My People Go " .

In their 2012 study of the relationship between homophobic attitudes in Jamaica and Britain , Keon West and Miles Hewstone described Williamson 's murder as the " most prominent " example of an anti @-@ gay murder on the island .

= = = Academic sources = = =