PREACHING TO THE PERVERTED:

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MICHAEL GLYNN.

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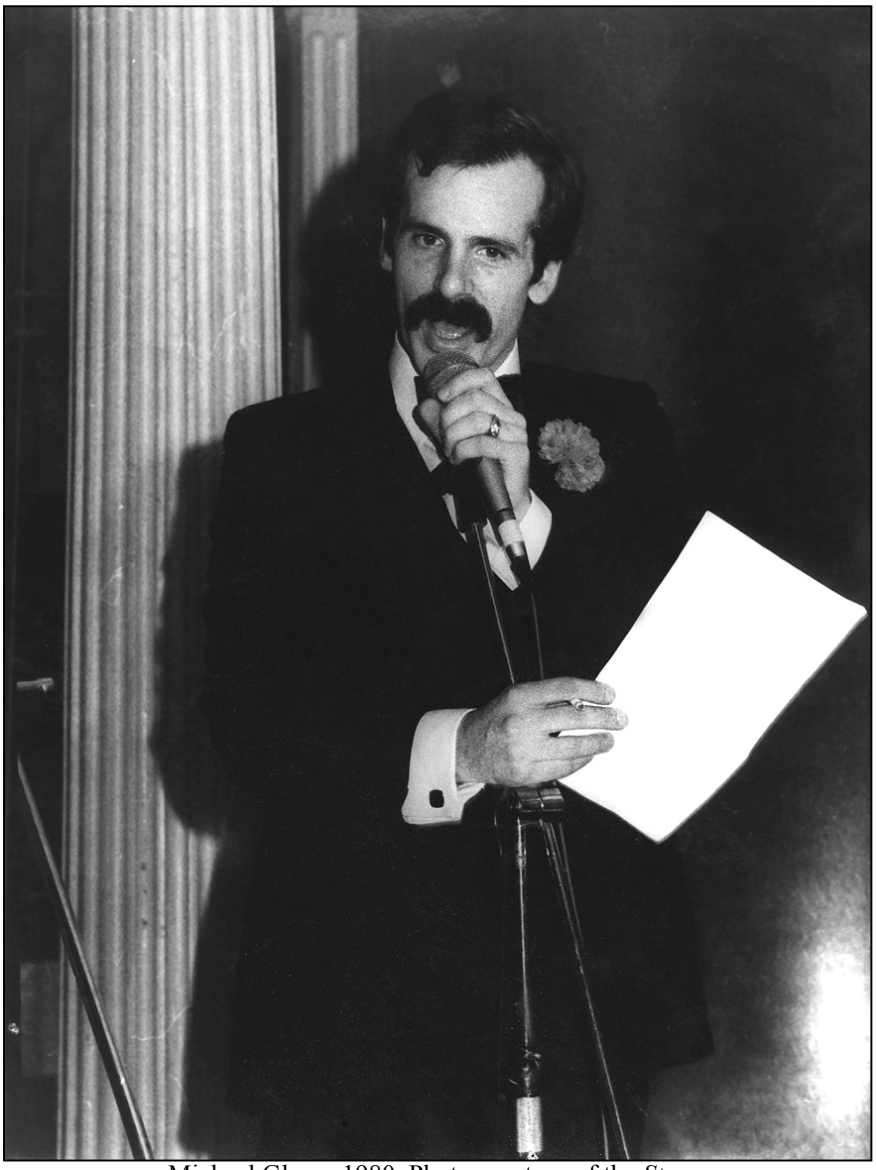

Michael Glynn, 1980. Photo courtesy of the *Star*.

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Prologue

Michael Glynn was found dead in his Glebe Housing Commission terrace on Wednesday 10 July 1996. To paraphrase Auden's *Funeral Blues*, no one stopped the clocks or held the presses. It was deadline day, after all, and the page proofs for that week's edition of the *Sydney Star Observer* – the newspaper Glynn founded almost two decades earlier – had to be at the printers by 6pm. It wasn't until the following day that reports of Glynn's death filtered into the *Star* office on Oxford Street, a noisy thoroughfare lined with gay bars and clubs and known as Sydney's golden mile.

Glynn had emigrated to Australia from the USA in 1971. He was a good-looking 23-year-old then, still shy about embracing his sexuality but aware, after seeing in Boston the surf film *Endless Summer*, that Australia had erotic appeal.

"The guys in *Endless Summer* were travelling around the world, following the sun and the surf," Glynn recalled in an interview with a former editor of the *Star*, Larry Galbraith. "They went to Melbourne, then they came to Sydney, but on both occasions it was overcast and raining and the waves weren't doing much. Then they ended up in Darwin. And I saw these men wearing Speedos and of course I grew up with boxer short swimwear, so the Speedos were a bit of an eye-opener. And that's about the only thing I knew about Australia before I came down here" (Galbraith, 1995).

Glynn, who taught high school English and drama for several years after he arrived in Australia, would have expected his death to make the front-page of the *Star,* and it did. Glynn's photo appeared underneath the *Star* masthead on 18 July 1996, next to a photo of a fellow American drama queen, Truman Capote. Glynn's photo pointed readers to a tribute on page three, penned by a long-time *Star* contributor, Gary Dunne, who described Glynn as a lanky American with no shortage of attitude and chutzpah (Dunne, 1996, p. 3).

I was one of three journalists who worked at the *Star* at the time of Glynn's death. Ben Widdicombe and Julie Catt were the other two staff journalists, and we reported to Bernie Sheehan, who was the newspaper's second lesbian editor in 17 years. All of us knew of Glynn as the *Star* founder but none of us had any contact with the man whose vision for a gay community newspaper we had inherited.

Certainly, we were fiercely protective of the newspaper and its reputation. We valued its status as an independent and critical voice within Sydney's gay and lesbian community and its role as the community's journal of record. The *Star* we worked for in the mid-1990s had evolved into a much more polished version of the newspaper Glynn founded in 1979 but it nevertheless remained true to Glynn's original vision. We reported on breakthroughs and setbacks in AIDS treatments; and on continuing street violence against lesbians and gays. We pushed back against the Wood

Royal Commission and its conflation of homosexuality with paedophilia; and we celebrated court victories that included insurance payouts to same-sex partners and human rights rulings against discrimination. We carried arts reviews and scene photos, lists of event information and community contacts, and humourous columns about love and lust. We boasted an audited, weekly circulation of 24,682 and were frequently cited by mainstream media as a source for stories about gay and lesbian issues. Digital services such as Gaydar and Grindr were unheard of at the time. Instead, the *Star* carried page after page of classified advertisements from sex workers, escorts, and masseurs; and columns of 'personals' from gay men seeking casual or long-term connections: "31YO, 5'8 70kg. Turned on by stocky man with hairy chest, mo. Into anything that's safe. Very b'minded" (anon, 1996, p 33).

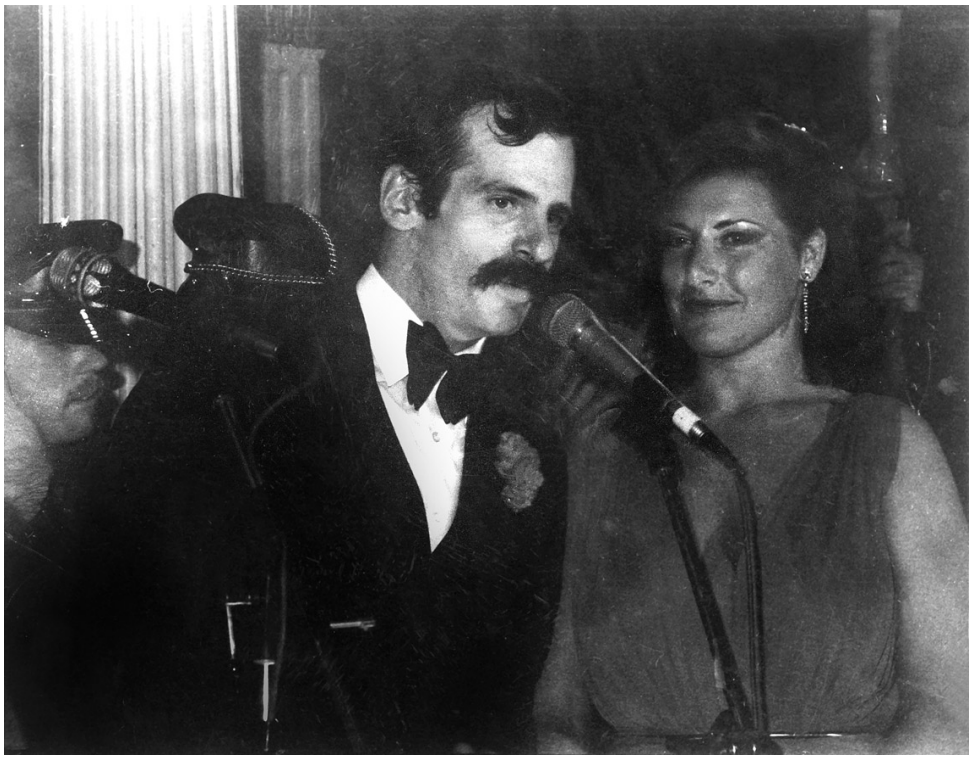
We had made good on our inheritance. But we were too busy to spare much thought for the *Star*'s origins. Thankfully, others did. Dunne interviewed Glynn in June 1994 for the *Star*'s 15th anniversary edition, and Galbraith recorded an interview with Glynn in December 1995. Those two interviews are unique in that they allow Glynn to provide a public account of his life. But of course that's not the full story. There exists a shoebox full of Glynn's personal papers and diaries, a collection that reveals some of Glynn's torturous interior life. As well, Glynn's surviving friends, lovers, co-workers and peers have their own memories and their own versions of events. One of them is the gay activist and former Sydney City Councillor, Craig Johnston, who was commissioned

by Dunne to write a brief reflection on Glynn and the *Star* for the newspaper's 15th anniversary edition. Johnston's account provides the starting point for this thesis:

> For me, I guess, the Golden Age of the gay/lesbian print media will always be Michael Glynn's *Star*. I first came across it when Michael and friends like Dennis Scott were handing it out from a little table, night-time, just near Capriccios.
>
> It took on a tabloid format, personified the passion and commitment of Michael, was full of infuriating typing mistakes, upbraided the gay male community into maturity, was loved and hated, depended on volunteers, printed absolutely everything you gave it (which was great for the homosexual law reform campaign and my campaign for election to Sydney City Council), happily antagonised advertisers, lived on a shoe string (which couldn't last) and was entirely maverick and unpredictable – except for its unshakeable commitment to gay power and community development.
>
> In these days when poofs and dykes who work for the homosexual print media are just as likely to wear red braces as purple overalls, our media could do worse than remember the eight pillars of homosexual politics expressed in the first *Star*. Sexuality. Identity. Community. Gender non-conformism. Camp. Enterprise. Militancy. Radical social critique. Think about it for a while, if you want (Johnston, 1994, p. 37).

Mr Leather 1980

Real stories are untidy. They're almost always fragmentary. It's how you make people understand the fragments that can have coherence.
- Edmund de Waal (Barrowclough, 2012, p 4).



Michael Glynn as Master of Ceremonies at Mr Leather, 1980. Photo: the *Sydney Star*.

Picture, if you will, a nightclub called Stranded, in the basement of Sydney's elegant Strand Arcade. This former corset salon morphed in the late 1970s into a nightclub that was popular with boys who liked wearing David Bowie make-up and girls like the so-called Baskerville sisters, who were post-punk New Romantics. But tonight, those kids are elsewhere. Instead, over one hundred homosexuals cram the room, drinking and laughing loudly. Gilt-framed mirrors and heavy chandeliers, left behind by the venue's former corset sellers, reflect the room's eagerness.

Mr Leather competitions first surfaced in Chicago some years earlier. They are a beauty contest of sorts, but not for the young and the conventionally beautiful. In fact, the rules specify that physical appearance matters less than the convincing projection of a look. Contestants are given a score out of 100, based on three criteria: their leather image (a maximum of 40 points), their presentation skills (a maximum of 40 points), and their physical appearance (a maximum of 20 points).

The contestants for the 1980 Australian Mr Leather Contest are men aged from their late 20s through to early 40s. Backstage, Patrick Brookes and Frank Black share a joke while they make last-minute adjustments to their gear. Frank wears black leather briefs and boots, nothing else; Patrick is in full leather regalia: military boots, biker cap, leather pants and biker jacket. A leather harness is pulled tight across his torso, nicely emphasising his pectorals.

The man holding the microphone, centre-stage, is the self-appointed Master of Ceremonies, none other than Michael Glynn. This lanky American expatriate with the handlebar moustache is barely one year into his gig as founding publisher and editor of the *Sydney Star.* In that short time he's positioned himself and his newspaper as champions of leather and the sworn enemy of Sydney's prevailing homosexual style.

"You don't have to adopt the limp wristed fairy image," Glynn would say.

“You can look like a clone, you can look more like yourself. You can take what you wear at work and go straight into the scene and still look good. You don’t have to put rouge on, dress up and all that stuff.”

Tonight is a special occasion. Glynn is wearing a dinner suit with a red carnation in his lapel, his bow tie is black leather. Glynn reminds his audience of the business at hand, which is to find an Australian leather man to send to Chicago for the 1980 International Mr Leather event. He introduces each contestant, his deep, strong voice filling the room with an unexpectedly Bostonian polish. His years of teaching English and drama at private boys schools had taught Glynn the art of projection. His father, a hypnotist, had taught him the art of showmanship.

Each Mr Leather contestant has his exit and his entrance, strutting his time on the stage. But it is Brookes who steals the show. He comes on bulging in all the right places, hairy-chested and broad shouldered, as compelling as a young Marlon Brando. Brookes, an architect from Newtown, not only wins the title as Australia’s Mr Leather, 1980 but goes on to win the International Mr Leather contest in Chicago the following month. No Australian has ever repeated that success.

It would be attractive to portray that night in Stranded as a seminal moment in gay Sydney’s cultural history. Certainly, Glynn’s discovery of home-grown talent as momentous as Patrick Brookes was proof that leather was a viable – some would say compelling – alternative to gay

Sydney's long-running love affair with camp. But leather was not entirely new to the scene. *William and John*, an Australian gay magazine that pre-dated Glynn and the *Star,* had given leather some national editorial coverage; while in Sydney, in the early 1970s, leather had found a home and a gang of followers at an Abe Saffron-owned bar called the Barrel Inn in Kings Cross.

Glynn's star was on the ascendant that night in Stranded. He and the newly-minted Australian Mr Leather 1980, Patrick Brookes, belonged to the same brotherhood. But it turned out that Glynn was devoted to the leather lifestyle in a very different way to Brookes. Years later, when Brookes was asked about his time as Australia's Mr Leather, he responded: "I don't really understand people who say their lifestyle is 'being a leatherman'. Do they live and go to work in leather? To me, it's just an image of a particular fantasy. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time, with the right image. When people ask 'what's a leatherman?' I say, 'well, what's it to you?' There are thousands of images: cowboys and Indians, Marlon Brando, people in uniforms and even construction workers. It's a fantasy, it's not what defines you, it's maybe just one of your characteristics — like being left-handed or redheaded. It's not the whole you."

Brookes' quote points us towards that fascinating place where fantasy weakens reality's grip. A nightclub called Stranded, on this occasion, provided Glynn and Brookes and their audience with a space within which

they could abandon the everyday. But Brookes saw boundaries where Glynn saw none. Brookes was a visitor to the world of leather; Michael Glynn lived there. By triumphantly publishing photos in the *Star* of that night at Stranded, Glynn consciously blurred the distinctions between private and public. He wanted to publicise a homosexual fetish for leather because he believed leather and all it represented disrupted the straight world's stereotypes of gay men, as well as gay men's' expectations of themselves. Said Glynn: "Before leather bars, the gay scene was more or less ruled by the drag scene. But with the leather bars came the idea that you could be both man and gay. The fluff image was traded for the macho image."

While the 1980 Mr Leather competition may not necessarily mark a turning point in gay Sydney's cultural history, it nevertheless is a significant moment in Glynn's personal narrative for two reasons: it showed leather as a triumphant gay style, and it placed Glynn centre-stage at that moment of triumph, as neither a judge nor a contestant, but as Master of Ceremonies. The event coincided with a seismic shift in Sydney's gay style. As writer Gary Dunne put it, gay men were cutting their hair and sending their silks and satins to St Vinnies; they were discovering their nipples and the consequences of overdoing amyl on the dance floor.

A photo of Brookes accepting his Mr Leather trophy graced the front cover of the next *Star* (18 April 1980). Glynn published yet more photos

of the event in the following edition of his newspaper, a fortnight later. There was a photo of Frank Black in his leather briefs, a photo of the hunky Patrick Brookes in harness, and a photo of Glynn as he wished to be seen: in control and centre-stage; owning the microphone and his audience, surrounded by images of this new gay masculinity, hairy-chested, moustached and sexually charged.

Glynn presents himself as a master, if not of the universe, then at least of this particular world.

Chapter 2:
The Harlem Hideaway

Terrence Michael Glynn was born on 7 April 1948 in Chicago, Illinois and spent most of his childhood in Newark, New Jersey. "My early life," Glynn recalled, "was upset by the breakdown of our family unit when my father broke court orders, grabbed my three older sisters and disappeared. Leaving my mother and I to our own devices. I was very young at the time and have no recollection of these events."

Glynn's mother, Evaleen, later re-married and raised her son with her new husband, Martin Snyder, and his two children, Barbara and Kevin. Terry, as Glynn was known then, was a musical kid with a gift for words. He became editor of the school newspaper at the Newark School of Fine & Industrial Arts and captain of the school debating team. He was so proud of these achievements that he listed them on the resume he prepared after he left the *Star*, alongside his high school music major, specialising in chorus, band and orchestra.

Glynn didn't see his father again until 1970. By that time, Glynn was a good-looking, six-foot-two psychology student at Boston University who made ends meet by working odd jobs as a kitchen hand. Glynn's father, meanwhile, had become a 'world-famous hypnotist' and showman who travelled the US. Shawn Masters, as Glynn's father called himself, was in Boston to perform a couple of shows in the nearby Tufts University auditorium. A reviewer from the *Harvard Crimson*, Garrelt Epps, later

wrote about Masters' performance, noting that the hypnotist was "fleshy and self-assured" in his royal blue dinner jacket, black cummerbund and tie, and dazzling white shirt. "He had something of the same air that a photogenic politician or male movie star has when seen in person: the slightly artificial, larger-than-life appearance of a man who has been weathered by thousands of eyes."

The *Harvard Crimson* liked Masters' show. It would start off with Masters hypnotising volunteers from the audience and telling them they were kids in a sandpit. The volunteers would act accordingly, generating some laughs in the audience. Then Masters would tell his volunteers they were monsters. The hypnotised recruits would pull gruesome faces and act menacingly, drawing even more laughs from the audience. But the loudest laughs came when Masters told his recruits that they were homosexual monsters. The sight of these college students on stage, acting as if they were gay monsters was so funny, the *Harvard Crimson* reported, that it almost brought the house down. Glynn junior was not out at the time and we can only imagine what he must have felt as he watched his father perform.

While they were in Boston together, Glynn and his father agreed they should travel and work together. "Shawn told me he was going to Australia and maybe I would consider becoming his business manager," Glynn wrote in a letter to his stepbrother, Kevin. "I wasn't too happy with living in the US because of the draft and the Vietnam War. I didn't like

what I imagined the country was doing to itself. So I made the decision to immigrate to a country that I knew little about."

Glynn's new job title was "personal agent and business manager for Dr. S. Masters". On arrival in Sydney, in mid-1970, father and son booked the Harlem Hideaway in Coogee for their first Australian gig. The venue would have seen better days, by then, and has since been converted into a low-rise apartment block with views over the Pacific Ocean, but the Glynns – in true showbiz tradition – were optimistic. Their advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* advised readers to book early for the Harlem Hideaway show because Doctor Shawn Masters was 'the greatest entertainer in the science of hypnosis' and had just finished an unprecedented two-year run in the United States, breaking all show business records.

"As Shawn's business manager, I had to try and break into the club scene, which was like a cross between Las Vegas and Bingo Church Halls," Glynn boasted in his letter to his stepbrother. "Suddenly I was thrust into the world of nightclubs and entertainment, driving a big black Cadillac, which people constantly stared at, and dealing with managers, meeting entertainers, slipping the maitre'd a few bucks to get a table upfront. I did manage to get Shawn a gig at one of the bigger clubs but he screwed the deal with one of the directors. Shawn was very pig-headed and opinionated. He couldn't keep his mouth shut when maybe he should have. Like me, except that I have mellowed recently.

"My karma for that time ended with Shawn and I having a falling out. I moved out and started teaching high school and invited Shawn over for coffee and cake. Well the cake was too spacey [sic] for him and he got very angry and stormed out. I have not seen or heard from him since. My flatmate at the time, another New Yorker, Ron Resnick[1] and I just laughed our heads off at Shawn's reaction.

"I believe Shawn to be dead by now. I do not know. It's a curious thing to have no family. People dying, I understand. But a deliberate forsaking and rejecting of flesh and blood I found very curious and sad. Blood is not thicker than water."

[1] Resnick later imported the pro-marijuana lifestyle magazine, *High Times*, into Australia.
[2] ARC was an alternative acronym to describe the cluster of AIDS-defining illnesses experienced by people with advanced HIV infection. It

Chapter 3:
A Star is born

Unemployed, Glynn enrolled himself in a drug education program offered to student teachers by the New South Wales Department of Health. That gave him enough leverage to secure a teaching job at Marist Brothers North Shore High School in North Sydney, where he worked for a while. He then moved north to Brisbane, where he taught at the Church of England Grammar School. A few years later, Glynn was back in Sydney, teaching English and drama at Barker College in Hornsby.

None of these jobs lasted for long. Glynn could build a strong rapport with some of his students but he failed to get along with many of his peers or fit into the schools' administrative hierarchies. That much was made clear by the convoluted job reference the head of Barker's English department gave Glynn on his departure: "Michael Glynn is clearly an independent thinker who has nevertheless shown himself to be willing to attempt to work within fairly restrictive policy guidelines," Mr R. E. Kefford wrote. "His opinions and attitudes were always forcefully expressed in staff meetings, and I have valued the contributions he has made in this area too, inasmuch as a more radical view than that which one would choose to adopt now often 'marshal'st [sic] one the way that one was going'. I wish him well in his new sphere."

Angus Reid, a student at Barker College during the 1970s, remembers Glynn well. "He was a loud forthright American with a big

moustache! He was very different from the conservative teachers we had in other subjects. I don't think we really knew what to make of him. And then he was suddenly gone. There was speculation that he'd gone under a cloud but I seem to remember it being explained to us that he had a back problem.

"My biggest memory is the Whitlam dismissal [11 November 1975]. We were in class with him when it was announced. Being all good conservative kids, we cheered Gough being thrown out. Michael Glynn was furious and shouted us down. He said we were idiots and didn't know what we were on about. He said it was a disaster and that everyone needed to take care as there would be rioting in the streets."

Unemployed again, Glynn returned to the USA. He travelled for a while, visited his mother, and ended up in Los Angeles working as a cook at the Friars Club in Beverly Hills. They were wild times. It was the height of the disco era, and Glynn immersed himself in all that was on offer. "Donna Summer would walk into Studio One and everybody would stop dancing with each other and we'd all dance with her. I was just a party animal. There was a drug dealer who had two refrigerators in his apartment. When you called him up you never had to ask what he had. You would just arrive there, and you could have anything in the world. I partied myself to the point where I realised I had to come back to Australia for a rest."

Glynn returned to Australia in 1979, in time to witness phenomenal growth in Sydney's gay sub-culture as large numbers of homosexuals moved away from the suburbs and rural towns to meet up with each other in the city. In the late 1960s, Sydney's homosexuals had few venues to choose from: the stalwarts were Ivy's Birdcage at Taylor Square, and Capriccio's, on Oxford Street. But from the early 1970s onwards, a flood of new gay clubs and bars opened on the strip of Oxford Street that became known as the Golden Mile. Historian Gary Wotherspoon recorded this extraordinary growth: Patchs was first in 1972, followed by Flo's Palace, The Tropicana (which became the Midnight Shift) the Ox, Pete's Bar, Palms (later Scooters), Syd's (in Crown Street just off Oxford), Buck's, Saddletramps (in the Exchange Hotel), The Old Bank, and Four AM. Ruby Red's, a lesbian bar, also opened nearby, in Crown Street. Many of these bars were short-lived, wrote Wotherspoon. Some, like Capriccio's, were burnt out. Literally. Others still flourish today.

Glynn's idea to start a newspaper for this emerging gay community came from a friend, also recently returned from America. The friend brought home with him a copy of a gay business and entertainment guide from Texas. "I looked at it and I thought this would work here because we've got nothing," Glynn said. "There were no free papers going, just *Campaign* [a monthly gay lifestyle publication] and that was it."

Despite the extraordinary growth in Sydney's commercial gay scene, Glynn wanted more. "Having a look around town at the various venues, it was pretty poor pickings. There was Patchs, Caps, The Barrel Inn, Bottoms Up, The Beresford … if you were going out, it was drinks and drag shows and that was it. I gathered that if we put all this in print, or the lack of it, that people would wake up and say, 'we can do better than this'."

Glynn printed a couple of hundred copies of his first *Sydney Star*, dated 16 July 1979, and he hand delivered the publication on Friday night to Oxford Street's gay venues. "On the Monday morning, I went around to all the businesses, picked up the cheques and cash for all the ads and went and paid the printer. That was the first issue."

There were 16 pages in that first issue of the *Star*. There were plenty of naked male bodies on display, advertising gay venues such King Steam and The Kensington Karate Klub. There was also an astrology column, a review of *The China Syndrome,* and a page of entertainment and business listings that promoted local cafes and gyms as well as a gay psychologist in East Sydney, a solicitor in Double Bay, and a clothes shop called Louis French Casuals, in Darlinghurst Road Kings Cross. Several community service announcements were included in this mix, inviting readers to join a gay soccer team or a suburban social group.

Glynn took the opportunity to write an editorial for his first issue, introducing a set of themes he would return to often:

> G'day. You are reading *The Sydney Star*: a Gay Business and Entertainment Guide, published fortnightly and distributed free of charge to Gay businesses throughout Sydney. You may thank our advertisers who brought us to you.
>
> We hope that we can serve you, the advertised who own's/manages his/her own business; the resident who lives, works and plays in Sydney; and the visitor who comes from the country, interstate or overseas.
>
> We are one week old today and, as in all new births, we need to grow and understand. We need your help for that. If you have any special events, or juicy bits of gossip let us know. We need sources for local news concerning gay life in Sydney. Gay consciousness does not come but once a year. We also want to support Gay Businessmen. Let us know who you are.
>
> Finally, I will continue to be humbled by the magnitude of the conflicts that seem to be the foundations of life. These conflicts may sometimes overwhelm us, as they did to a lady who lived, worked and played in this city. She wasn't "Gay" and she didn't really understand what it meant to be "Gay". But she did believe in standing up and expressing her self, her rights, her feelings.
>
> Some of us have just finished celebrating Gay Solidarity Week, when we tried to express ourselves through various ways. If we had a strong sense of community, a real feeling of support from friends and others, then we might be able to face the conflicts that rage about us. We could live in unity and strength and love. The whole process is called "getting your act together". We can do it. You can do it. Reggae Lady – this is for you.

The obscure references Glynn included in his first editorial to "Reggae Lady" were not explained until much later. Before launching the *Star*, Glynn had become friends with a retired Olympic skier, Christine Smith. Theirs was a brief friendship, cut short when the 32-year-old Smith ended her life in May 1979 by swallowing paracetamol and salicylic acid in a Crows Nest motel.

Smith's death, and the way it was reported, informed Glynn's subsequent decisions about his new venture. "The bank was giving her [Christine Smith] a bad time and I was helping her out trying to get things going," Glynn recalled. "The bank manager was treating her very harshly, I thought. The pressure got too much so she drove off one weekend, checked into a motel and suicided. I think I still have the newspaper with the headline. She made the front page of *The Telegraph*. They used the exact words 'The Sydney Star' and that's where the name came from. It was a tribute to her, a straight woman."

Chapter 4:
Mardi Gras madness

The huddle of abandoned corrugated iron sheds that stood on City Road, opposite the University of Sydney, belonged to the CSIRO before they were taken over in the late 1960s by a group of academics who declared they were establishing an 'experimental art workshop'.

There was nothing charming about the Tin Sheds, as they were known. They were cold in winter and unbearably hot in summer, and the red and white checked curtains installed in the small studio space that Lloyd Rees occupied were often believed to be an ironic nod to domesticity, given the otherwise shabby surrounds. But the Tin Sheds' lack of charm was no deterrent to young student radicals who wanted to push artistic boundaries. Throughout the '70s, the Tin Sheds provided a physical and an intellectual home for artists, collectivists, anarchists, feminists and the otherwise unconventional.

The sheds housed unexpected riches. In 1972, two Federal policemen injudiciously arrested the anti-conscription campaigner and anarchist, Michael Matteson, on the Sydney University campus. Matteson had been handcuffed and detained on the University's front lawn but he was quickly surrounded by 100 students or more, all of them pressing in so close that it was impossible for Matteson, the arresting police, or anyone else, for that matter, to move. Someone sent for the bolt-cutters that sculptor Bert Flugelman was known to keep in his Tin Sheds studio. The

cutters were smuggled back through the crowd and before anyone was the wiser, Matteson was cut free. He disappeared into the crowd, leaving the police red-faced and empty-handed.

Art and political activity went hand-in-hand at the Tin Sheds. When Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser embarked on a series of savage budget cuts, arguing that life wasn't meant to be easy, artists at the Tin Sheds stepped up their late-night screen-printing sessions, producing street posters lampooning Fraser and his austerity measures. And as the anti-uranium movement gathered pace, the Tin Sheds presses rolled, delivering posters that proclaimed: 'mutate now, avoid the rush'.

Not surprisingly, a young, self-described Trotskyist by the name of Ken Davis felt right at home in the Tin Sheds. So did his homosexual comrades, fellow members of the Gay Liberation Group, who began to use the Tin Sheds as a meeting place to plan their political activities. At the time, Davis was a 22-year-old university student, fully committed to the emerging gay rights movement.

On Saturday 24 June 1978, Davis joined 500 other activists as they marched through central Sydney, from Town Hall to Martin Place, commemorating the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York. It was a peaceful event, the largest gay march Sydney had ever seen. But there was more to come. Davis and his friends re-grouped in the evening for a 10pm march down Oxford Street. While the day-time march was intended to raise

public awareness of gay rights, the evening parade – which came to be know as Sydney's first Gay Mardi Gras – was a way for liberationists, straight and gay, to get their message across to the large numbers of homosexuals who drank at the gay bars along Oxford Street but were otherwise disengaged from the gay movement.

"Out of the bars and into the streets," the marchers chanted as they walked down from Taylor Square towards Hyde Park, following the sound truck that had been hired to add a carnival air. Things were going swimmingly until the parade reached Hyde Park. Then trouble broke out. Although the organisers of this first Mardi Gras had secured a permit, the police seized the sound truck and the marchers took off, swinging into William Street on their way to Kings Cross. By now, 2,000 or so people had joined the parade, and tempers were fraying. The mood turned ugly as police waded in, dragging 53 marchers kicking and screaming into the waiting paddy vans. There were beatings, and some marchers were seriously hurt.

Next morning, a crowd gathered outside the police station in Darlinghurst, calling for the release of those who were arrested the previous evening. There were more protests over the following days: an estimated 300 people gathered outside the Liverpool Street courts when charges against the Mardi Gras marchers were first heard. Incredibly, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published the names, addresses, and jobs of those arrested on 26 June 1978. Large-scale protests continued throughout the rest of the year, with police making a further 73 arrests at a 'drop the charges' rally at

Taylor Square in late August. Again the *Sydney Morning Herald* published the names and other personal details of the people arrested, a decision that justifiably rankled many.

Ken Davis and many other gay liberationists understood the enormous political capital that was inherent in Mardi Gras and its aftermath. By mobilising large numbers of lesbians and homosexuals in unprecedented ways, for Mardi Gras and for the subsequent 'drop the charges' rallies, activists had not only raised homosexual visibility but also directly challenged state sanctions against same-sex desire. But the unpredictability of the first Mardi Gras ensured that the planning for the second Mardi Gras in 1979 was fraught with tension. Opinions were divided over whether or not Mardi Gras was giving the public the wrong impression about homosexuals; gay businesses, particularly the bars and clubs that operated in breach of the liquor licence laws and the laws against homosexual sex, were concerned about the fall-out that would come from antagonising the police; and some members of the suburban gay clubs worried their neighbours would react badly to TV images of police arresting screaming gay and lesbian activists.

Nevertheless, young liberationists and left-wingers such as Ken Davis had control of the Mardi Gras agenda, at least for the time being. The Tin Sheds at Sydney University became Mardi Gras' de-facto headquarters, and it was here that members of the Gay Liberation Group met to discuss logistics and strategies. As Davis remembers it, up to 100 people crowded

into the Tin Sheds for these meetings. Smaller groups of volunteers dedicated themselves to specialised tasks such as screen-printing the Mardi Gras posters and other material. Into this hot house stepped the unknown gay American, Michael Glynn.

Glynn was well into planning his new gay newspaper by the time he turned up at the Tin Sheds, ostensibly looking for an interview with a Mardi Gras organiser. Davis very clearly remembers the encounter:

> An American guy came along to one of these collective meetings and said he was running a new paper that was going to come out. He wanted to do an interview.
>
> So I went off to talk to Michael but it wasn't really an interview. He went into a tirade. He wasn't asking me anything, he was just yelling at me. He was saying we were all incompetent, that we hated the police, and that what we were doing was the wrong way to go forward. He said if we didn't stop the Mardi Gras he would make sure we all got arrested.

It was an extraordinary outburst. Here was a man who said he was publishing a newspaper 'to raise gay consciousness' and who claimed to have witnessed, ten years earlier, the Stonewall riots in New York's Greenwich Village, triggered by one too many police raids on a Mafia-owned gay bar called the Stonewall Inn. No other single event in the

1960s had done more to raise ‘gay consciousness’ in the American psyche, yet Glynn was denouncing Sydney’s version of Stonewall, threatening to urge police action against the Mardi Gras organisers if they didn’t desist. It made no sense, politically, for the editor of a new gay newspaper to so vehemently oppose an event that had galvanised thousands upon thousands of Glynn’s target audience.

Nor did Glynn’s position make sense from an editorial point of view. Like it or not, Mardi Gras offered unlimited editorial opportunities. It was an opportunity to profile Sydney’s emerging gay community and its associations with a global social movement that profoundly troubled accepted social structures, gender roles, and conventional religions. In short, here was the biggest story of the year for a fledgling gay newspaper publisher. But the opportunities went untouched. When the very first edition of Glynn’s *Star* hit Sydney’s streets on 6 July 1979 - just six days after the second Mardi Gras had attracted around 5,000 participants - there was not one photo from the parade or one word about the event.

Production deadlines may have been offered as an excuse and amends made at the next opportunity. But Glynn’s next edition of the *Star*, published a fortnight later, carried nothing but a perfunctory two-sentence mention of Mardi Gras, buried on page four. Here’s what it said:

> Over 2,000 men and women participated in the Mardi Gras down Oxford Street. Many in the peaceful crowd were dressed in a festive

manner and danced in the streets to the beat of Disco music.

According to author Gary Dunne, Glynn ignored Mardi Gras because he detested the left wing, campus-style radicalism that activists like Davis embodied. Says Dunne:

> On the far left you had the longhaired, pro-feminist, gay liberationists who wanted to overthrow the patriarchy and Yankee imperialism. On the far right you had the American, Michael Glynn, who wanted to build a gay economic enclave in Darlinghurst. In the middle you had the moderates: organisations like Camp Inc that wanted law reform and middle class acceptance.
>
> The first Mardi Gras' were organised by left-wing ratbags, Sydney Uni types, so I can imagine Michael not wanting to promote them. Many people opposed the idea of confronting police and demanding rights and reforms. It only made the cops nastier by night. I know he was in favour of law reform later, so his disinterest could have been as simple as the fact that he wasn't running the thing, that he hadn't even been consulted.

By his own account, Glynn admits he feared fringe elements taking control of the parade and provoking confrontation with police. Contrary to what might have been expected from a young homosexual American who opposed the Vietnam War, Glynn favoured order over confrontation. He

later explained himself in a December 1995 interview with the former *Star* editor, Larry Galbraith:

> What I understood to be the circumstances surrounding the ’78 Mardi Gras was that everyone, all the authorities and everybody, were happy to have the Mardi Gras proceed down Oxford Street and camp down at Hyde Park. My understanding is somebody then got a bit wild and suggested that they all move on up to Kings Cross, which was not in everybody’s plans to begin with. To me that’s just not orderly. If you tell people that you’re going to go and do something, especially when you’re disrupting traffic in the city, you try to have a bit of responsibility about that.
>
> I expressed the feeling [at the Tin Sheds meeting] that that kind of disorderly conduct should not occur, that we should be able to do this thing without confronting the police.
>
> I suspect that what happened at the ’78 Mardi Gras was that the organisers lost control of the crowd. That was my concern. If we’re going to go out on the streets and do this stuff then we ought to have our act together. If we do break the law, fine, if that’s in the plan and we all agree on it. But for some fringe elements to gain control of the people… No, I was against that.

Glynn's attitude to Mardi Gras changed very quickly. Although the '79 Mardi Gras rated nothing but a two-sentence mention in the *Star*, the 1980 Mardi Gras saw Glynn gleefully participating, entering his own float in the parade. In 1981, Glynn took the next step and joined Mardi Gras' organising committee. By this time the people Glynn thought of as fringe elements were outnumbered. Mardi Gras' new guard focussed on moving the event from mid-winter to late summer, a change that severed Mardi Gras' direct connection to Stonewall but promised a better return on investment. Better weather would bring more people, more people meant more business, and more business meant more power.

To this day, Ken Davis can't think of Michael Glynn without remembering the Tin Sheds and the lecture Glynn delivered against Mardi Gras and its organisers. It coloured the way Davis viewed Glynn forever after. And Davis' take on the outburst? "I figured Michael was either operating on behalf of the police or he was aligned with Dawn O'Donnell, Abe Saffron and the Syndicate."

The two possibilities were not mutually exclusive.

Chapter 5:
The Syndicate rules

The car bomb that killed Joe Borg in 1967 presented a former professional ice-skater by the name of Dawn O'Donnell with an opportunity too good to miss.

Borg was a brothel owner whose assets included a set of terrace houses in Sydney's working class suburb of Ultimo. O'Donnell was a 40-year-old Rose Bay butcher with ambition; a fearless woman whom the *Sydney Morning Herald* had unwisely described as a crusty old lesbian. O'Donnell sued the *Herald* for defamation and settled out of court, terms undisclosed.

While the rest of the city worried about who would be killed next in the battle for control of Sydney's underworld, O'Donnell made her move. She snapped up Borg's terraces in Ultimo, adding them to an expanding property portfolio that included a car park near Central Railway Station and the butcher's shop in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs. Soon after the Borg acquisitions, O'Donnell moved again. Seeing the opportunities presented by Sydney's emerging gay economy, O'Donnell opened her first gay bar, in 1968. It was on City Road, just a few metres away from the Tin Sheds.

The Trolley Bar, as O'Donnell's City Road venture was known, was the first of many gay and lesbian venues the entrepreneur would own and

operate over the coming decades. She ran some of these venues; others she established in partnership with underworld boss Abe Saffron, whom O'Donnell first met at her Central Station parking lot. O'Donnell also went into business with another man, a former chef by the name of Roger Claude Teyssedre.

O'Donnell was a working class kid who grew up in Paddington, selling firewood out of a wheelbarrow to help her family survive. At 18, she won the Australian women's speed-skating championship; soon after, she appeared in the *Puss-in-Boots* ice show at the Empress Hall in London. That was 1953 and O'Donnell's life as a professional ice skater was a world away from the mean streets of Paddington. But the dream wasn't to last. A skating accident put an end to it all and O'Donnell returned to Sydney in the mid-1950s, marrying a policeman, Neville Irwin. By 1958 the marriage was over and O'Donnell had found a new partner, Julia Farmer. Together they helped establish a social group called the Chameleons, staging shows at a Salvation Army Hall in Glebe Point Road, Glebe and later, in a Masonic Hall in Petersham. The Trolley Bar, when it opened in 1968, was but a small step in the O'Donnell trajectory.

O'Donnell's business partner, Roger Claude Teyssedre, was the sort of man the tabloid newspapers called 'flamboyant'. He was a French chef and restaurant owner who realised, like O'Donnell, that there was money to be made from Sydney's homosexuals. In 1974, he opened King Steam,

a wildly successful gay sauna, and used the King Steam profits to buy into a string of other gay ventures.

Journalist Tony Stephens reports that Teyssedre first met O'Donnell in her Eastern Suburbs butcher's shop. "You've got the best pair of legs I've ever seen. You must be a lesbian," Teyssedre allegedly told O'Donnell. The two hit it off instantly and decided to go into business together. They took over a failed gentlemen's club on Crown Street and opened Jools Theatre Restaurant with much fanfare. Such was the strength of their connections that the NSW Premier, Robert Askin, opened the bordello-themed nightclub on the pair's behalf. Never mind that the club would later be destroyed by fire; an insurance pay out would more than compensate the owners for their loss.

Abe Saffron completed this Darlinghurst triumvirate. Saffron, otherwise known as Mr Sin, ran the Pink Pussycat and other strip clubs in Kings Cross. He was the head of a powerful organised crime network known as The Syndicate, and he had key members of the NSW Police Force and much of the local Kings Cross and Darlinghurst constabulary on his payroll. Many believed Saffron's influence extended all the way to the NSW Premier, Robert Askin. As Abe's son, Alan Saffron, would later write in his biography, *Gentle Satan: My Father*, *Abe Saffron*: "Dad's reputation for discretion, silence and integrity spread quickly amongst high-ranking police and government officials and before long, he became the 'go to' man for vice, liquor and corruption."

O'Donnell and Saffron enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship. O'Donnell fronted businesses that Saffron could not own directly because of restrictions on the number of hotel licenses that could be owned by one person. O'Donnell put her most trusted employees forward as licensees, and her businesses benefited from the blind eye that police turned her way when it came to complying with a venue's licence conditions. It was a cosy arrangement that allowed O'Donnell, Teyssedre and Saffron to monopolise Darlinghurst's gay venues. After Jools came the nightclubs Patchs and Flo's Palace, followed by the Exchange Hotel and Ruby Reds. O'Donnell also owned the Tool Shed sex shops on Oxford Street, and later, two Newtown gay hotels, the Imperial and the Newtown. "Against such a backdrop of sex and drugs and disco," wrote Sandra Harvey in *The Ghost of Ludwig Gertsch*, "Roger-Claude, Dawn and Abe [Saffron] began a slow tango of entanglement."

Glynn knew what he was getting into when he started the *Star*. He'd become aware of the Sydney underworld business model when he worked as a chef at Maxy's, a late-night café and restaurant on George Street, opposite the cinema strip. According to Glynn, the police station around the corner from Maxy's supplied a steady stream of uniformed officers who would come in to Maxy's to collect pay-offs from the manager. The experience, he said, made him realise that one of the first things he should do when he started the *Star* was to find out as much as he could about the people with whom he would be doing business:

> So I went down and spent some time at Corporate Affairs, or what was then known as Corporate Affairs, and I cross-referenced companies and directors. And yes, you could find a trail. Of course, when you're having conversations with the people who run the backroom bars, and they're talking about 'Abe this' and 'Abe that', then sure, you become aware of these connections. People wanted to ignore all that. And they've done a good job of it over the years. I guess it's part of our history that we're not proud of and we don't really want it recognised. But it's there.

People who encountered Glynn in those early days of the *Star*, people such as the Mardi Gras activist Ken Davis and the journalist, Richard Turner, figured Glynn had to be involved in some way or another with Dawn O'Donnell. Her gay business interests were so extensive that it would be impossible for Glynn to avoid her. Certainly, O'Donnell's position as a power broker within Sydney's commercial gay scene could not be overstated. If Glynn secured O'Donnell's blessing, he would gain access to a valuable advertising stream as well as secure the Syndicate's tacit protection.

Davis assumed Glynn was aligned with O'Donnell and the Syndicate because that was the only way to make sense of Glynn's outburst against the fledgling Mardi Gras. O'Donnell would have opposed a street parade like Mardi Gras because its initial focus was not on the commercial gay

scene. Instead, Mardi Gras organisers wanted to get punters out of the Syndicate's bars and clubs and put them on the streets. A potential loss of revenue was not something O'Donnell and her associates would ever endorse. From the Syndicate's point of view, the other problem with Mardi Gras was that it invited unwelcome attention from outsiders to Oxford Street's illegal business dealings.

Turner, who worked as a reporter for the *Star*, says Glynn "very definitely had a relationship" with O'Donnell. Glynn, however, consistently rejected any suggestion that his newspaper was beholden to interests associated with the Syndicate. But that's not to deny that underworld interests applied pressure on Glynn and the *Star*, sometimes subtly, sometimes brutally. It all came to a head in 1984 as the campaign to reform the NSW laws against homosexuality gathered pace. This is because Saffron's underworld network flourished wherever illegal or semi-legal activities took place in NSW: prostitution and gambling, out-of-hours alcohol sales, stripper clubs and gay bars all contributed to the Saffron coffers. Protection rackets and pay-offs were part and parcel of these business dealings. So if homosexuals succeeded in removing themselves from the *Crimes Act*, they would also likely succeed in excising the gay economy from this criminal milieu. Gay bars would be less inclined to pay for police protection; gay entrepreneurs would be less reliant on underworld finance to set up shop; and spheres of influence would realign. Ultimately, homosexual law reform was about power. If the gays on Oxford Street won some power for themselves and their businesses, somebody else

would have to give it up. Saffron, O'Donnell and Teyssedre knew that 'somebody else' was them.

Glynn told Galbraith about a meeting he had with O'Donnell and Teyssedre, during which threats were issued, and later, made good:

> Dawn O'Donnell and Roger Teyssedre sat me down at the Koala Oxford Hotel and said 'we don't like this law reform business, we want you to stop it'. And then they threatened me with pulling out their advertising.
>
> Basically I walked away from there, telling them to take a flying fuck at the moon. They did pull their advertising and we struggled on. But it was a severe blow in terms of cash coming in because all we had to rely on [for advertising revenue] were the venues.

The *Star's* business model was always precarious. Being a free newspaper meant that advertising revenue was critical. Without advertising dollars the newspaper would not exist. The *Star* also needed to quickly build a reputation for readability and secure unfettered access to primary distribution points in the bars and clubs throughout the newspaper's heartland. This meant staying onside with the Syndicate-owned gay bars and clubs in Darlinghurst as well as the new, independently owned gay pubs such as The Beresford and The Flinders that were opening off Oxford Street.

Fault lines in this business model became evident as soon as the *Star* reported on events that threatened Oxford Street's status quo. At first, interests associated with the Syndicate wondered out loud about whether the *Star* risked damaging Oxford Street's relationship with the NSW police by reporting incidents of police harassment of gays. Of even more concern, to some, was the way the newspaper reported on a fire that gutted the Midnight Shift nightclub at 85 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst. Glynn was faced with a choice: should he report with his constituency's interests in mind, or protect the Syndicate's interests? He chose the former.

Fires were unusually common in Darlinghurst's gay nightclubs in the '70s and early '80s, especially in those nightclubs owned by the Syndicate. Jools Theatre Restaurant was gutted by fire in 1977, and a lesbian bar called the Peak, in Bondi Junction, also burst into flames as the 1980 financial year came to an end. Three months later, another gay bar called the Pits also went up in smoke. These fires were understood to be 'Syndicate stock-takes'. Such stock-takes allowed nightclub owners to close or re-vamp their businesses with the help of a nice insurance payout. When a fire ripped through the much-loved Capriccio's nightclub on Oxford Street, patrons figured the Syndicate was at it again. But the Midnight Shift fire was different.

The Shift, as it was known, was a men-only venue. It was one of a handful of new, independently owned Darlinghurst gay venues whose success threatened the Syndicate's dominance of Sydney's commercial gay scene. Like the Beresford Hotel and the Flinders Hotel, The Shift was proving to be enormously popular with gay men who identified with the denim and leather 'clone' look recently arrived from San Francisco and New York. You can't have one clone. You have thousands, wrote Craig Johnston in a 1981 essay, *Clones and the question of liberation:*

> If you know what to look for you can recognise each other in the street. You don't have to exchange furtive glances at the traffic light any more to check whether he's one of us. His clothes tell you a hundred meters away. To be a clone is to be as openly homosexual (at least to other gays) as a participant in a gay rights march. Right down to the T-shirts which read 'clone'.

The Shift was a loud and smoky bar with a 'masculine' dress code. Men danced there for hours on end, high on amyl and the smell of each other's sweat. The Shift's dress code meant drag queens such as Trixie Lamonte were refused entry because showgirls, at that time, never wore leather. Or denim. Trixie was furious. She was an Oxford Street institution in her own right, a seasoned performer who trod the boards at many a Syndicate-owned venue. She threatened to call in the Anti-Discrimination Board if the Shift continued to knock her back. Patrons were only half-joking when they said the Shift wouldn't last.

Thankfully, no one was hurt when a firebomb exploded in the Shift's main bar in the early hours of Tuesday 21 October 1980. The venue was closed at the time. But the fire caused extensive damage, estimated at around $100,000, and it sent the clones into shock. How far would the Syndicate go to intimidate its opposition and retain control of Sydney's lucrative gay scene?

Volunteers helped clear the rubble and put the bar back into some kind of working order. Leaflets were handed out, advertising a party in the bar's burnt-out shell on Sunday 2 November at 10pm. Pubs such as the Flinders advertised the fundraiser over their PA system. "Hundreds of men packed the bar," recalled Craig Johnston in *Gay Community News. "*The atmosphere was jubilant and cruisy, a huge banner proclaimed the new ideology of hedonism and upfront male sexuality made possible by the sexual radicalism of the '70s: 'Give us your sweat'."

Johnston saw the fire at The Shift marked a turning point for gay Sydney. He knew the way Shift patrons and supporters mobilised after the fire was an act of solidarity among the newly identified clones and a direct challenge to the Syndicate. According to Johnston, the Shift fire also forced the hand of Sydney's gay media and Sydney's gay activists:

> The attitude of the establishment gay media has been equivocal. While deploring the burning, *Libertine* and *Sydney Cruiser* came out with the line that rumours were unsubstantiated and divisive.
>
> The independent *Sydney Star*, on the other hand, took a strong position, reflecting its social base among clones and leather queens, and courageously so, given that Syndicate bars advertise in it. The *Sydney Star*'s stand, which must give it credibility in the gay subculture, was in contrast with the silence of the gay activists.
>
> In a situation where there was a unique opportunity to make an expose of the role of the Syndicate in the subculture, to forge an alliance with independent gay small business against monopolisation, and to establish the principle of democratic control of the gay community through the holding of a broadly-sponsored, open general meeting on the issue, the left did nothing.

The Shift was no shrinking violet. It announced it was back in business by setting up a searchlight on Oxford Street when it re-opened on November 7, 1980. The searchlight soared into the sky and bounced off the clouds, says Johnston. "Queens lined up for 100 metres to get in. The Shift was back."

Chapter 6:
Getting elected

Harvey Milk's 1977 campaign for election to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors provided a template for aspiring gay politicians in Australia.

Milk was not the first openly gay man or lesbian to win political office in the US. That honour belonged to Allan Spear, Kathy Kozachencko and Elaine Noble, who were respectively elected to the Minnesota State Senate, the Michigan City Council, and the Massachusetts State Assembly in 1974. But Milk's victory was unique because it demonstrated that a gay candidate could mobilise gay voters in predominantly gay neighbourhoods in order to win office. No one had ever done that before.

Gay activists in Sydney took note of Milk's success. So did Glynn, who was inspired by Milk's ability to bring small business owners together to form the Castro Valley Association. If the gay clubs, bars and bookstores in San Francisco's gay heartland could unite in support of gay economic and political interests, then Glynn figured that Sydney's gay businesses could do the same. Milk's small business agenda resonated with Glynn's own entrepreneurial bent, and in the early '80s, Glynn established the Gay Business Association along similar lines to its Castro Valley counterpart.

Milk's focus on small business was an astute political move. It enabled Milk to successfully and simultaneously position himself as a champion

of gay rights, small business, and the economically marginalised. It was a winning combination. But on 27 November 1978, a former police officer and City Hall politician called Dan White assassinated Milk and San Francisco's mayor, George Moscone.

White later received an eight-year prison sentence for the double murder. His attorney successfully argued that White could not be held accountable for his crimes because he had eaten too much junk food on the day they were committed. The outcry that followed White's sentencing quickly turned violent. Milk supporters marched on City Hall, smashed windows and torched police cars. The San Francisco police retaliated by donning riot gear and raiding several Castro Street bars, where they assaulted patrons at random.

Milk's election, and murder, reverberated through gay communities around the world. It established once and for all that the 'gay vote' was no longer a figment of gay activists' imagination. It proved that gay businesses and gay voters could see themselves as an economic as well as a political entity. And it reminded gay men and lesbians everywhere that a vicious backlash could be unleashed at any time.

David Widdup first introduced the Australian electorate to the idea of an openly gay political candidate in 1972. Widdup worked for the Teachers' Federation and was a member of the homosexual rights group, CAMP (Campaign Against Moral Persecution). He set his sights on the Liberal

Prime Minister William (Billy) McMahon's electorate of Lowe, in suburban Sydney, and he campaigned under the memorable slogan, 'I've got my eyes on Billy's seat'. Widdup's numbers were no match for McMahon's, but his campaign nevertheless drew media and public attention to homosexual issues. Which of course was the point of the exercise.

In June 1978, Peter Blazey threw his hat in the ring as the Gay Liberation candidate for the seat of Earlwood. Blazey, who was a former press secretary to a Liberal minister, Andrew Peacock, stood for election using the catchy slogan 'Put a Poofter in Parliament'.

"In those days it was easy to stand for a by-election," Blazey later recalled. "One simply left a deposit of one hundred dollars cash with the returning officer, plus a nomination form signed by six local voters, and one was declared a candidate. When the list was published I found to my delight that the Labor candidate, Ken Gabb, was an unmarried man living with his mother and the Liberal candidate was Alan Jones, the right-wing media commentator who subsequently became the subject of an incident outside a London bog."

Blazey had a snowflake's chance in hell of getting elected. But he campaigned in a conservative, suburban electorate soon after Sydney's first gay Mardi Gras ended in brutal police arrests because he knew he would get media coverage for gay rights.

"In my luckiest TV appearance, Mike Willesee's crew followed me while I was soliciting votes in the main street. There were diverse opinions expressed, but one little old lady dazzled the audience when she said she would vote for a gay candidate and that she approved of homosexuals. 'We've got two of them living in our apartment block. They're much nicer than men,' she said. Strangely, I was unable to persuade the two major candidates to debate gay rights. They avoided me like poison."

The momentum to put a poof in parliament gathered pace at the same time as Glynn's newspaper consolidated its position in the Sydney gay community. But those who were serious about getting elected – as distinct from drawing media attention to gay issues – paid attention to Harvey Milk's template and focussed their attention on councils in and around inner Sydney where gay businesses and gay residents were most heavily concentrated.

In November 1983, the *Star* announced it would publish a regular column from Brian McGahen, a gay man and Communist Party member who was closely associated with the Sydney Mardi Gras organising committee. McGahen had decided to run as an independent candidate for election to the Sydney City Council, and he knew the *Star* would be critical to the success of his campaign. Glynn gave McGahen unfettered access to *Star* readers by offering him a regular column, which he called, simply, *Getting Elected*.

"Brian McGahen has announced that he will be an Independent candidate at the coming City Council elections," the *Star* declared. "Brian's supporters hope to make him the first representative of the Gay Community of the City Council. Between now and the election next April, Brian has agreed to write a regular column in the *Star* about his election campaign and his thoughts about gays and public office."

McGahen won a seat in the 1984 Sydney City Council election, thanks in no small part the *Star*'s support. Inner-city voters sent two other openly gay candidates to join McGahen on the Sydney council: Bill Hunt (who was elected as a member of the South Sydney Resident Action Group) and Craig Johnston, who successfully campaigned as a gay representative of the Australian Labor Party (ALP).

From the early 1980s onwards, the *Star* found itself at the centre of intense debates about gay political representation. Large numbers of letters to the editor argued the pros and cons of electing independent gay candidates such as McGahen, and a similarly large numbers of letters to the editor urged readers to support gay or lesbian ALP candidates such as Johnston, and later, Susan Harben. The gist of the debate was this: should gay voters stick with the ALP, despite the glacial progress of homosexual law reform, because it was the party most likely to deliver social reform; or should gay and lesbian voters abandon the Catholic-dominated Labor Party on principle, and give the independents a go?

The debate crystallised most spectacularly every time voters in the electoral district of Bligh went to the polls. Bligh was a swinging seat that encompassed the working class suburbs of Woolloomooloo, Redfern and Chippendale, the newly gentrified suburbs of Paddington and Surry Hills, and the wealthy enclaves of Elizabeth Bay, Edgecliff, and Darling Point. The seat had also become a gay stronghold. The only one of its kind in Australia.

Throughout most of the ’80s, Bligh sampled every kind of politics on offer. The seat started the decade in Liberal hands, but it went Labor in 1981, thanks in part to the pro-gay stance of the ALP candidate, Fred Miller. Four years later, however, Bligh swung back to the Liberal Party, by just a few hundred votes. It was never clear whether the gays in Bligh were part of the anti-Labor swing, or helped staunch Miller’s loss. Either way, the Liberal’s Michael Yabsley owned the seat for the next four-year term, only to then lose Bligh to the unstoppable, gay friendly independent, Clover Moore.

Moore was a veteran of local politics. In the late 1970s, at about the time that Glynn started the *Star*, Moore formed a residents’ action group called Redfern Community Concern as a grassroots response to local issues that she believed were being ignored by the neighbourhood’s ALP representatives. In 1980, Moore successfully campaigned as an independent for election to South Sydney Council, and in the following

year, she was elected an independent to the Sydney City Council. Moore was a consistent performer with an expanding inner-city power base. She worked hard for her constituency from the beginning, unequivocally supporting her electorate's ethnic and Indigenous minorities as well as its lesbians and gay residents.

Bligh's gay and lesbian voters remained loyal Moore supporters across three decades and throughout several elections. Their vote helped Moore retain Bligh until the seat was abolished in 2007 and replaced by the electoral district of Sydney (which Moore also won). Every one of these battles for Bligh left its mark on the *Star.* Advertisements, news items, opinion pieces, editorials, and letters to the editor spruiked the gay or gay-friendly credentials of Miller, Yabsley and Moore. If ever there was doubt about the existence of the gay vote, here was irrefutable proof that it existed, and mattered.

Glynn's political allegiances were a source of constant frustration for some of his colleagues. Glynn campaigned against the ALP's Fred Miller in the 1981 Bligh campaign, and in the same year, he campaigned against the ALP's Robert Tickner in a by-election for the local seat of Wentworth. According to *Star*'s Richard Turner, Glynn and a fellow American expatriate, Gary Beauchamp (who published the gay magazine, *Campaign)* decided to support the Liberal candidate for Wentworth, Peter Coleman, because they believed that was the best way to challenge the ALP's belief that the gay vote was rusted on.

“That was just ridiculous. It was an impossible call. And it drove the Gay Rights Lobby people completely offside,” Turner said.

Turner could never quite understand Glynn’s political conservatism. “I would always come up against this impossible juxtaposition in Michael. He was an activist and he was openly gay but had this incredibly conservative political viewpoint.”

Chapter 7:
Clones and community

American porn star Al Parker was famous among those who valued what he had to offer. He was bearded and moustached, lean and well defined, and he starred in over a dozen gay porn films with titles such as *Heavy Equipment* (shot in 3D), *All Tied Up*, and *Inches*. The synopsis for Parker's *Turned On* is typical of the genre. By the end of the film, we're told, "Parker has mouthed eleven men, humped five butts, and taken several men over the edge to orgasm."

Parker, like Glynn, embodied a particular kind of late-20th century, pre-AIDS gay sexuality. Such men were known, proudly, as clones. Parker was the clones' apotheosis; Glynn was a devotee. Clones shared a uniform and a sexual code: tight blue jeans, t-shirt, checked-shirts, boots and leather jacket; short hair and moustache. They were supposed to be emotionally detached, hedonistic and sexually charged. "The clone speaks in monosyllables," wrote David Feinberg in his novel, *Eighty-Sixed*. "He dances alone in the discotheque, pinching his own nipples. The clone is self-sufficient. The clone is hot sex. He never stays over for the night."

Clones were the beneficiaries of the 1960s sexual revolution and the 1970s gay liberation movement, although some questioned just how liberated these men really were. The clones eschewed the previous generation's camp styles for a consciously masculine projection of an identity that was understood by some to be a reaction against the

stigmitisation of homosexuals as sissies. The clones first emerged on the streets of the Castro gay ghetto in San Francisco in the late 1970s and soon became a social and cultural force in the gay ghettoes of New York, Washington, London, Sydney and elsewhere. For Australian academic, Dennis Altman, the clone was the logical starting point for his study of the emergence of homosexuals as a new minority within Western culture. In *The Homosexualisation of America, the Americanisation of the Homosexual*, Altman wrote:

> By the beginning of the eighties a new type of homosexual man had become visible in most large American cities and could also be found, to a somewhat lesser extent, in most other Western urban centres. No longer characterised by an effeminate style, the new homosexual displayed his sexuality by a theatrically masculine appearance: denim, leather, and the ubiquitous key rings dangling from the belt. The long-haired androgynous look of the early seventies was now found among straights, and the super-macho image of the Village People disco group seemed to typify the new style perfectly…

The *Star* espoused this new gay style. Before 1979, Sydney's gays were considered to be either longhaired counter-culturalists in silks and satins, or drag-loving opera queens. But the *Star* replaced these old stereotypes with a brand new set of images. The newspaper favoured cover photos or illustrations of hairy-chested clones and leather-clad bikers. Inside the *Star* there was more of the same: homoerotic illustrations in the style of

Tom of Finland. Bulging biceps, biker caps and chaps were the order of the day, and the new ethos was supported by many of the *Star*'s advertisers. "We're not all washed-up 'show' girls or disco queens," declared an advertisement placed by Folkways Music in Paddington. "Folkways offers a wide range of REAL MUSIC IN THIS SEA OF SHIT … No Opera!"

There was a fair amount of crossover between the clones and the gay leather scene, and Glynn's personal interest in these expressions of gay sexuality permeated his newspaper. As Glynn proudly proclaimed in a 1980 editorial:

> To many people, the *Sydney Star* is heavily into Leather and a macho male sexist image. To some extent this is true. One of the main reasons for this is the growing awareness amongst the people in the 'leather scene'. As a group they can be just as narrow-minded, sometimes, as other gays. But there are many individuals who are actively exploring their sexuality and their lifestyles. They are not static in terms of their personal awareness. After 20 (or more) years of camp/drag/queen domination of gay life, it's OK to be a <u>man</u> and be gay.

If the *Star* was the clones' newspaper, the Beresford Hotel was their home. When it opened off Oxford Street in late 1980, it immediately struck a chord with the same audience the *Star* appealed to. The Beresford's new licensee, Barry Cecchini, was a former Qantas staffer

who lived in the increasingly gay neighbourhood of Surry Hills. Cecchini took over a former working class pub and created a new style of gay venue, suitable for the new style of gay man. As a street-level pub, the Beresford was a world away from the Syndicate-owned nightclubs on Oxford Street's Golden Mile. The Beresford proudly advertised itself in the *Star* as the first hotel in Sydney owned and operated by gays, for gays.

The fact that the *Star* and the Beresford shared a common demographic is significant. It meant that this new-style pub, and others that followed, were perfect distribution points for Glynn's newspaper, and Glynn would adapt his newspaper accordingly. Beresford drinkers were clones. They gladly collected their copy of the *Star* from a pile that sat on top of the pub's cigarette vending machine, which was strategically placed near the entrance. It was prime real estate and Glynn knew it. So much so that he changed the format of the *Star* from A4-folded to A3 flat so that the newspapers sat squarely on top of the cigarette machine.

There had been a couple of attempts to establish a free gay press in Sydney prior to the *Star*, but none had solved the problem of effective distribution. Galbraith, who edited the *Star* some years after Glynn's departure, recalls:

> When I arrived in Sydney in '78 there was a thing called *The Advocate*, which lasted two or three issues. I think one of the reasons for *The Advocate*'s short life is that people were leaving the gay

> venues at two or three in the morning and the last thing they were likely to do was take a magazine home with them. They were hardly likely to want to read at that time of night, in that frame of mind.
>
> The thing about gay pubs, particularly The Beresford, is that they were a place where people could go to on Saturday afternoon or in the early evening after work, and have a drink. They could pick up the *Star* off the cigarette machine, they could read it at the bar while they were waiting for their mate, or they could quite naturally take it home.
>
> So what you had with the opening of The Beresford and other pubs such as The Flinders [opened a few months after The Beresford] was a distribution network. Leases and freehold purchases were cheap at the time, in that area, and the pubs all had cigarette machines. You had a ready-made readership and you had an advertising base. And these things coalesced at the same time that a gay sub-culture was starting to form.

Not everyone wanted to drink at The Beresford and embrace clonedom. Drag queens, camp gay men, opera queens, non-scene queens, and many other kinds of homosexuals populated the territories beyond clonedom, and when a satirical newspaper called *The Sydney Fart* made its brief appearance on Oxford Street, lampooning the clone monoculture of the *Sydney Star*, gay liberationists applauded the satire as a timely riposte.

Community organisations such as the Gay Counselling Service and the Gay Rights Lobby, together with events such as the Sydney Gay Mardi Gras (which changed to the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras) played a critical role in bringing the tribes together. Inevitably, questions surfaced at such times when significant numbers of clones, lesbians, leather queens, disco bunnies and drag queens, bar flies, opera queens, gay liberationists and student activists coalesced. Did this sub-culture constitute a community? If so, what did it stand for, and who was eligible to join?

"I can't stand all these clones together," hissed Dennis Altman's friend, David, while the two men were at a Gay Pride Day in Washington. D.C. in 1980. "'Look at that one', said David, pointing at a man who wore a miniature roller-skate suspended from a ring pierced through his nipple – 'would you go home with *him*?'"

The pierced nipple, wrote Altman, "seemed out of place in a gathering whose motto proclaimed 'We Are Family'. The crowd was good-humoured and ready to applaud anyone who made them feel good, as befitted a family outing; the speakers, whose speeches were duly translated into sign language, stressed a sense of community among lesbians and gay men. We need to encourage and develop our own culture, our own businesses, exhorted emcee Robin Tyler, and the crowd cheered." As Altman observed, the crucial question arising from such manifestations of gay culture is whether they prove the existence of a gay

community, “one held together not just by external hostility and commercial venues, but by self-created institutions and images”.

Despite its predilection for all things clone and leather, Glynn’s *Star* was a self-created institution that published self-created images of gay men. As such, it was deeply entangled in the conversation gay men and lesbians were having at the time about whether or not they constituted a community. From the outset, Glynn’s newspaper championed ‘gay consciousness’ and gay economic power. Glynn frequently published the phrase ‘think gay, buy gay’ in the *Star*. It was his mantra, a phrase that reinforced the identity shared by those who socialised in the city’s gay bars, cafes, gyms and saunas. In every edition of the *Star*, Glynn published a declaration. *The Star*, he said, was published as “a contribution to the building of the gay movement and the growth of gay consciousness ”. Towards the end of his first year publishing the *Star*, Glynn added the words “Gay Community News” to his masthead, by way of reinforcing the publication’s position as a community newspaper. Community-mindedness was never off Glynn’s agenda. In an editorial in the *Star*’s second edition, Glynn wrote:

> One of the main reasons for starting up this publication was to try to provide information to the Gay Community in Sydney. In the course of our discussions about the magazine we often came up against the fact that there seems to be no feeling of community at all in this city. Very often we are confronted by a certain bitchiness that tries to attack and

> pull down. Whether or not this has any relation to the national pastime of knocking all things Australian, I don't know. What I do know from talking with many people around town is that many of us are tired of this vile habit. What has been most often expressed in the course of putting this magazine together is the desire for the Gay Community to pull its socks up and get its act together.

When asked more than a decade later to reflect on the question of whether or not Sydney had such a thing as a gay community in the early 80s, Glynn was adamant:

> I was going out every weekend. I was seeing that community. I have documentary evidence, photos of that community. For people to stand up and state that we don't have a community, or to state 'what is this gay community bullshit?', these people have their heads so far up their arse they can't see daylight. The final proof of that, for me, was [that] identifiable people [were] popping up again and again at various places. To me, this spoke of community.

Chapter 8:
Lesbian inclusion

Lesbian representation in the *Star*, or more accurately, the lack thereof, is a perennial issue for the newspaper. The *Star*'s focus on gay male sexuality, under Glynn's editorship and under most subsequent editors, was the newspaper's strength and its weakness. It meant the newspaper had a clearly defined readership but it also alienated a significant proportion of Sydney's GLBTQ community, many of whom argued that the *Star* was not a genuine community newspaper but was instead a boys' own journal.

The *Star* was not the only gay organisation in Sydney that grappled with the issue of lesbian representation throughout the 1980s. The Sydney Gay Mardi Gras and the Gay Rights Lobby were also embroiled in intense debates about lesbian inclusion. Eventually both institutions changed their names to better reflect lesbian and gay interests: Mardi Gras became the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, and the Rights Lobby became the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby.

At times, the argument was clear-cut. By definition, a community based on the acknowledgement of same-sex love and desire could only properly exist if it fully celebrated the lives of its lesbian *and* gay members, despite their differences. Everybody stood to benefit from such a coalition: the community's texture and character could only be enriched by

strengthening the level of lesbian inclusion, and a true coalition of gay and lesbian citizens would have greater political clout than a community divided along gender lines. Yet things were rarely so simple. Gay men and lesbians had their issues, often based on conflicting attitudes to pornography and sex, feminism and sexism, patriarchy and separatism, commercialism, leather and drag, and political activism.

The *Star* struggled to engage with a lesbian readership from the beginning. "There has been a constant effort over the past eleven months to have some contribution from the lesbians in this city," Glynn declared in a May 1980 editorial.

"At this point, that effort has proven fruitless. And yet, there have been sexist charges made against this publication (which I admit to under the circumstances). I would challenge those lesbians who constantly complain about the attitudes of men to contribute in a positive way to a publication that is available to them."

Glynn's challenge to 'those lesbians who constantly complain about the attitudes of men' appears in an edition of the *Star* that is, like most other editions, overwhelmingly gay. The cover image Glynn selected for his May 1980 edition was an illustration of a man raising his singlet and undoing his fly. The social photos that Glynn published inside that particular edition of the *Star* featured large numbers of leather men enjoying the 1980 Australian Mr Leather Awards. Many of the

advertisements in the same edition of the *Star,* particularly those placed by gay sex clubs such as 253 Baths and Signal, featured images of naked men. The one and only image of a woman that appeared in the *Star* that fortnight was an image of the singer, Judi Connelli. She is pictured in an advertisement for her 17 May performance at Coronation Hall in Botany Road, Mascot, organised by the Capricorn Social Club.

Gary Dunne recalls an incident at a gay and lesbian community meeting in Sydney in the late ’70s that was considered indicative of Glynn’s position on the question of lesbian inclusion.

“Michael made his famous comment to some dyke who wanted the *Star* to publish more lesbian content: ‘You tell me what you want, and if it makes sense, I'll maybe give it to you,’ he said, or words to that effect. He was universally loathed by the Left, especially by the dykes, who saw him as a sad victim of the patriarchy because he was sexually attracted to the worst aspects of masculinity. That was the whole clone thing he was into.

“The dykes preferred witty fembot pooves like Ian MacNeill and I who could quote Virginia Woolf back at them. Then they went seppo [lesbian separatist] and butch themselves. Go figure. Maybe power corrupts.”

Two episodes reported in the *Star* in the early 1980s illustrate the ebb and flow of tensions between gay men and lesbians at the time. Tempers flared at the Eighth National Homosexual Conference in October 1982

when lesbian separatists hijacked the plenary session to protest about drag as a negative portrayal of women. Writing in the *Star*, conference participant Robert Johnston described the protesters "as some sort of new Calvinists … whose attitude denies any self-mockery… and the knowledge that farce lies at the centre of existence".

Johnston's comments suggested a conceptual, if not existential, difference existed between gay men and lesbians. Yet a month later, in November 1982, the *Star* published a news report about efforts being made to foster a coalitionist approach to lesbian and gay politics. A conference would be held in Sydney in the week prior to the 1983 Gay Mardi Gras, the *Star* reported. The conference title, *Our Lives/Our Selves, a Festival for Lesbians and Gay Men*, made it clear the event was intended to foster a gay and lesbian coalition, and *Star* readers were told that individuals or groups could organise their own activities and workshops. Doing so would allow the event's coordinating committee to concentrate on arranging a few central activities and meeting places to give a focus to the festival. "Under this plan," the *Star* noted, "it is believed that both lesbians and gay men will feel the freedom and room to create their own activities and events without the intimidations or pressures they might otherwise feel from a strong central committee that could be seen to represent one section of the community."

The *Star* was almost two-years-old by the time it featured lesbians on its front cover. Frances Rand shared that honour with Susan Harben. The two

friends were photographed at the launch of the *Sydney Gay Guide*, which had been produced as a fundraiser for the Gay Counselling Service. They made history when their image appeared on the front page of the *Star* on 8 May 1981. Rand went on to co-publish the magazine *Lesbians on the Loose*; Harben would later become president of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and an unsuccessful ALP candidate for the seat of Bligh.

In August 1983, the *Star* published a report on the opening of the Belmore Park Hotel, billed as Sydney's 'first gay hotel for women'. "This reporter couldn't stop smiling all night, totally caught up in the high energy and excitement of a bar that was absolutely bursting at the seams with women," readers were told. There were no photos to accompany this news report. However, the same edition of the *Star* did find space for a double-page photo-spread of the 1983 International Mr Leather Chicago competition, replete with shirtless men in chaps, harnesses and spiky codpieces.

The *Star*'s coverage of lesbian news and social events remained sporadic. But as 1983 unfolded and more people felt the impact of AIDS, it became apparent that Sydney's gay and lesbian coalition would become even more important. An organisation known then as the International Gay Association (and later re-named the International Lesbian and Gay Association) issued a statement that year calling on gay men to learn from the experience of lesbians in challenging the health care system.

The *Star* reprinted the IGA statement, in August 1983. It read, in part: "We shall need to deal with problems experienced by lovers, relatives, friends, and those who are anxious about the possibility of contracting AIDS, as well as to provide support for people with AIDS. We recognise that the AIDS problem has been used to excuse attacks on lesbians as well as gay males. We believe that mutual support between gay males and lesbians is necessary to combat these attacks. We urge gay males to welcome women into AIDS work on an equal basis with males and to deal with their sexism in working together. We encourage gay males to learn from the experience of lesbians and other feminist women in challenging the health care system."

It wasn't until 1991 that the *Star* began publishing a regular lesbian column, *Catwoman.* A year later, the newspaper appointed Barbara Farrelly as its first lesbian staff journalist, and in June 1993, Farrelly became the *Star*'s first lesbian editor. By then the *Star* was a confident and assertive 14-year-old, ready, at last, to fully embrace a lesbian perspective.

Chapter 9:

A walk on the violent side

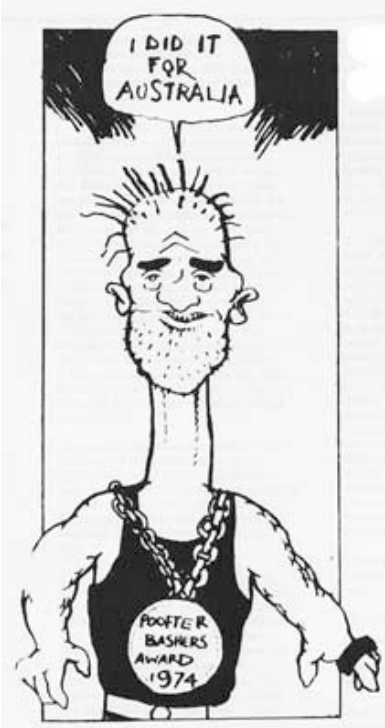


Figure 1: From the First National Homosexual Conference Papers, 1975, artist unknown. (Accessed 1 August 2011, www.pridehistorygroup.org.au)

In December 1982, the *Star* reported a major rise in the number of anti-gay bashings in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs and advised readers how they could minimise the risk of attack:

> For our own safety, it is important that we all be aware of the dangers and of the simple precautionary efforts we can take to protect ourselves. When out on foot always attempt to be with at least one other person. Always attempt to stay in well-lit areas. Above all, if attacked, never lie down and do all in your power to prevent being

> knocked down. It is far more difficult to cause serious damage to a person on their feet…
>
> We also have to work towards preventing the attacks happening. It is essential, therefore, to involve the police no matter how you feel about them. We all know how disappointing the police have been in following up reports of attacks. This will continue unless pressure is put on them … if you stand up to the police, they will be polite.
>
> Remember we can all protect ourselves and maybe stop and reverse the rising number of gay related bashings if we take these actions. If we do not, we may face the same horrifying situation that gays in major US cities face. Don't let violence get that far out of control.

Glynn and Turner were themselves targeted. The two men were walking through Green Park, opposite St Vincent's Hospital in Darlinghurst, when they were threatened by a group of young men. It was a 'fight or flight' moment. As Turner recalls, Glynn fled, while Turner fought back:

> It was mainly verbal violence but one of them attacked me physically. I respond to violence with violence. But most people, especially gay men, don't. They lie down or run. So I didn't blame Michael [for running]. But he was very embarrassed afterwards.

A public meeting to discuss the rise in gay bashings was announced in the 1982 Christmas edition of the *Star*:

> An alarming increase in gay-related attacks in the Oxford Street area has caused considerable concern to all members of the community. If you have been attacked and suffered physical violence you should attend this meeting. If you know anyone who has been bashed, you should come. If you're concerned about violence you should be there. Tuesday 21 December at 7.30pm Sydney Gay Centre 51 Holt Street Surry Hills.

Despite such advocacy, it took a long time for the Darlinghurst and Surry Hills police to properly record and respond to the violent assaults that were (and remain) a feature of gay life in Sydney. In the late '70s and early '80s, the police were part of the problem. Robert Lovett's experience at the hands of the Darlinghurst police in July 1981 was not unique. Lovett was detained overnight in the Darlinghurst cells after being arrested and charged for kissing another man at a gay disco. When Lovett's father came to lodge bail the next morning, he found his son with a swollen face, cut lip and badly bruised chest. The *Star* reported Lovett's treatment by the police, but unbelievably, when Lovett's case came to court, he was convicted of scandalous conduct under the *Offences in Public Places Act*. Lovett's conviction was later over-turned but no charges were laid against the police who bashed him.

Just a few months before Lovett's bashing, police officers from the Kings Cross station had hauled a gay man out of the Fountain Hotel in Kings Cross at 11pm and held him in a cell until 5am the next morning. No charges were laid against the man, nor was he informed of his rights. The man later completed a statutory declaration detailing the incident, but this made news nowhere other than page five of the *Star*.

But it was the *Star*'s report in January 1982 of two men being dragged off the dance floor at Caps nightclub on Oxford Street by two police officers from the Darlinghurst police station that provoked the most vigourous reaction. The police had detained the men overnight and charged them the next day with two counts each of hindering police, resisting police, and assaulting police. The men, however, provided a sworn statement about their ordeal at the hands of uniformed officers. They alleged the police had strip searched them and then bashed them, leaving one of the victims with severe damage to his eye. Glynn reported the incident on the front page of the *Star* and took it up as an editorial issue of profound significance for the gay and lesbian community. He wrote an accompanying editorial that declared:

> Over the last year we have received numerous reports from gay women and men about the attitudes and actions of certain members of the police force. The situation is abhorrent, akin to the treatment of Jews in Germany under the rule of the Nazi overlords … all of us everywhere should be filled with anger and outrage. All of us should take some

> kind of action to ensure our safety – not only from the "poofter bashers" on the streets but also from those who are paid to "protect us".
>
> What we must do is say NO! No more! We must demand it with all our strength. We must fight the battle for our freedom ... each and every one of us.

Street attacks on gays and lesbians were not the worst of it. Since publishing its first edition in 1979, the *Star* recorded the murders of dozens of gay men in Sydney. Some of these men were murdered in their home, some at beats in Rushcutters Bay, Alexandria and Narrabeen, and some died in mysterious 'accidents' that resulted in fatal falls off Sydney's seaside cliffs.

Constantine Giannaris, a Greek consul-general, was murdered in his home in Darling Point in November 1981. He would have struggled more than most to take his dying breath because he had a gag in his mouth, a knife in his back and a serious head-wound. Work colleagues discovered the consul-general's body on Monday 16 November 1981. Giannaris had missed a Saturday night cocktail reception and had failed to appear at work on Monday morning, so a couple of staff members went to the man's Darling Point home to check that everything was OK. Once inside, they found Giannaris' body, face down and fully clothed, in a pool of blood.

The police were called, neighbours and staff were questioned, and the surrounding streets were sealed off until evidence was gathered. It didn't look like a failed robbery; the only things missing were a home stereo system and Giannaris' car.

"He was a very quiet man, I don't think politics was involved," said a friend, George Tscidanis, editor of the Greek-language newspaper *Hellenic Herald*, in response to questions from an Associated Press reporter.

A few weeks earlier, on 17 October 1981, Gerald Leslie Cuthbert was found dead in his Paddington flat. He had been stabbed more than 60 times and had his throat cut. Three days later, a schoolteacher, Peter Parkes, met a similarly gruesome end. He too was found bound and gagged and stabbed to death in his apartment in Potts Point.

Two young men were eventually found guilty of the murders of Cuthbert and Giannaris. But there were other young people willing to perpetuate horrifyingly brutal assaults against gay men, often in the belief that police complacency in investigating anti-gay violence, together with existing legal sanctions against homosexuals and continuing religious pronouncements against gay men, legitimised or at least lessened their crimes. In November 1983, the *Star* ran the following news item:

> A 47-year-old gay man was stabbed to death last Thursday (27th October). Paul Edmond Hoson, retired, was found in his Elizabeth Bay unit by police. He had been stabbed 11 times, suffering massive injuries to his chest.
>
> Hoson was last seen alive on Thursday night just before 8.30pm in the Bottom's Up Bar at the Rex Hotel. A few minutes later he was seen walking across Fitzroy Gardens with a dark complexioned man. Police understand they had met in the bar.
>
> NB. Paul Hoson was a good friend of Kevin Costa who died recently from a fall off the cliff at Dover Heights.

In 2002, more than two decades after Giannaris died with a gag in his mouth and a knife in his back, the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) released a report into the deaths of more than 70 men who had been murdered in NSW in the past 20 years because of their homosexuality. The AIC report found what many *Star* readers knew from first-hand experience: that anti-gay violence is often exceptionally brutal and that the teenagers or young adults who attack lesbians and gay men often do so in the belief that society approves of their actions.

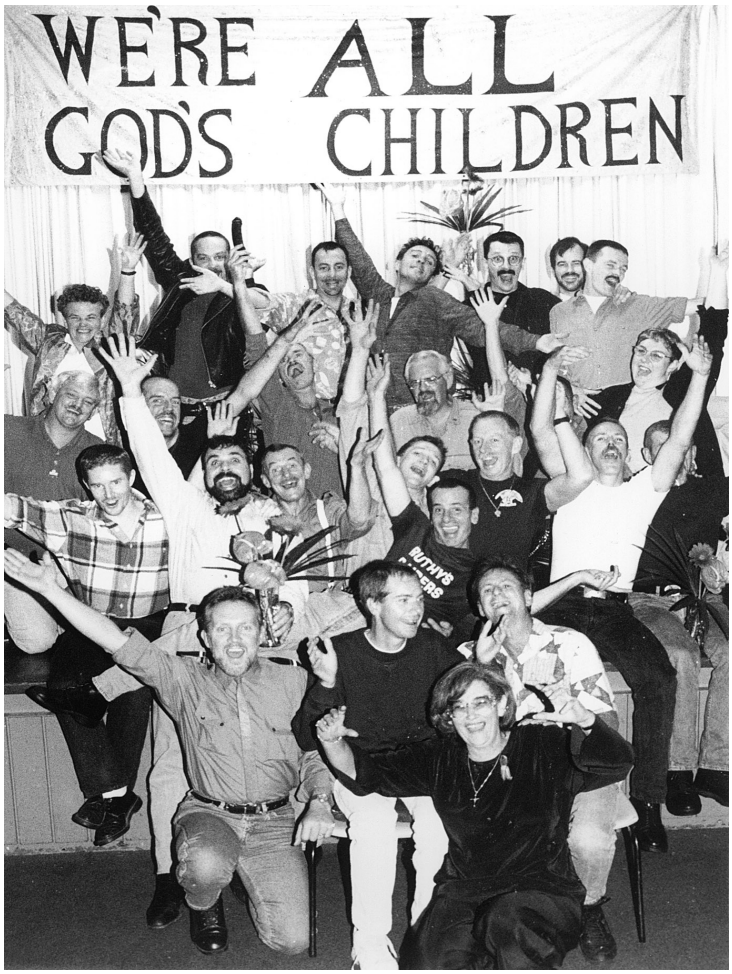
Former *Star* journalist Ruth Pollard, writing about the AIC report in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, noted that the weapons used to kill gay men in NSW included a claw hammer, a saw, a fire extinguisher, a spade, a car

wheel brace, and a crossbow and arrow. Most of the murdered men were in their 30s and 40s. The perpetrators of these crimes were primarily teenagers (43 per cent) or young men in their 20s (38 per cent).

Stephen Dempsey's murder was also included in the AIC report. The 34-year-old had been shot with a crossbow and arrow at a beat in Narrabeen, on Sydney's northern beaches. Dempsey's head, arms, and legs were cut off and stored in garbage bags; his torso was later found washed ashore at a beach in Pittwater. It was wrapped in wire mesh. A 22-year-old man and his 19-year old girlfriend were later committed for trial for Dempsey's murder. The couple said they had met at a church fellowship group at the Mona Vale Christian Life Centre.

Chapter 10:

Religion, spirituality and universal joy



Michael Glynn (second row, centre) with Metropolitan Community Church members and friends. Photo courtesy of the *Star*.

In his fictional series, *Tales of the City*, author Armistead Maupin created an unforgettable first encounter between the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence and the worried out-of-town parents of Maupin's lead character, Michael Tolliver.

Michael's parents, Herb and Alice, had come to San Francisco hoping to glean some details about their son's life. Herb, Alice and Michael were on

a street near Union Square, walking towards their car, when Michael felt the urge to reassure his parents all was well:

> ‘It’s an amazing city, Mama’.
>
> Almost on cue, the nuns appeared.
>
> ‘Herb, look!’
>
> ‘Goddammit, Alice! Don’t point!’
>
> ‘Herb … they’re on roller skates!’
>
> ‘Goddamn if they aren’t! Mike, what the hell …?’
>
> Before their son could answer, the six white-coiffed figures had rounded the corner as a unit, rocketing in the direction of the revelry on Polk Street.
>
> One of them bellowed at Michael.
>
> ‘Hey, Tolliver!’
>
> Michael waved half-heartedly.
>
> The nun gave a high sign, blew a kiss, then shouted: ‘*Loved your jockey shorts*!’

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence first appeared in Castro Street, San Francisco, in the late 1970s. These gay men with an irreverent sense of humour and dressed as nuns, satirised intolerance among the gay scene’s muscled clones as well as within mainstream Christianity. They also raised much-needed funds for AIDS care and other good causes, hosting amateur strip competitions in the Castro Street bars, blessing street parades and protest marches, and doing the honours at housewarmings or

other significant events. The Sisters' mission - to promulgate universal joy, expiate stigmatic guilt and serve the community - resonated with many gay men whose experience of religion had been joyless and guilt inducing. As the AIDS crisis deepened, and as many mainstream churches further distanced themselves from gay men and lesbians, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence provided practical and spiritual support for the many thousands of gay men who were bereaved, or dying, or both.

In November 1982, the *Star* published a lengthy interview with Sydney members of the Order. The interview ran over six pages, in two consecutive editions of the newspaper. It was an unprecedented allocation of space for such a topic, and interviewer Craig Johnston made the most of the opportunity to illuminate the substance beneath the satire.

Asked Johnston: 'Is the Order an anti-religious group or is it true, as is sometimes claimed, that you are a genuine religious order?'

Sister Mary, Third Secret of Fatima, replied: 'We're as genuine as any.'
Sister Mary Tyler Moore: 'We've had our visions.'
Third Secret of Fatima: 'And our saints – some of them are still alive.'

Johnston then asked: 'Why do you think religion is an important personal/political priority?' Sister Mary, Third Secret of Fatima, replied: "The religious aspect of the 'gay struggle' has got more important over the last couple of years. I guess I underestimated that. But when we say

things like ‘no more guilt’, which in a sense is a religious statement, people relate heavily to that.”

Not every gay man could relate to the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, or even thought them funny. A *Star* reader and Blue Mountains resident complained, in a letter to the editor, that he felt disgust and anger when he saw a story about the Sisters gathering in Katoomba, west of Sydney:

> Such activities may be funny at a private party… but to incite the ill will of so many people by cavorting around in a religious uniform in such a sacrilegious manner is sheer lunacy. If they must expose themselves and us to community ridicule then it behoves them to parade in their own front yards and soil their own nests. To travel to country areas, where understanding and enlightenment are hard-earned and slower to arrive, with the intention of angering and confusing people, is to sabotage the hard work so many of us have put in over the years, creating an image of normality and trustworthiness. Country hospitality is legendary, but one visit from the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence has well and truly worn out their welcome.
>
> - Richard Bickhoff, Co-ordinator, Country Network.
>
> 14 January 1983.

Religion and spirituality often featured in the *Star*’s news pages as well as in the newspaper’s letters to the editor. In October 1982, in a front-page report headlined ‘Positive Catholic Report on Gays’, *Star* readers were

told about a Catholic initiative in San Francisco, where a task force that included priests and social workers urged the Archdiocese to recognise gays and lesbians as full members of the Catholic community. Underneath the headline was the following editorial statement: "We hope that the Catholic Church in Australia takes notice."

Glynn was always sympathetic to requests from gay religious groups for editorial space. In late August 1983, the *Star* devoted half a page to a story supplied by the gay Catholic group, Acceptance. The group had recently celebrated its 10th anniversary by staging a gala dinner at the Gay Centre in Holt Street, Surry Hills, and the occasion presented an opportunity for Acceptance to publicise its existence to *Star* readers. "At first, Acceptance had to fly in a priest from Canberra to say Mass once a month … but soon there was a well-attended Mass every Friday and this is now a regular part of the Sydney gay scene," readers learnt.

In early 1983, Glynn published in the *Star* an interview he conducted with a fellow American, the Reverend Jim Dykes, who had recently arrived in Sydney from San Francisco to take care of the Sydney chapter of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). The story presented both men with an opportunity to consider the magnitude of the coming AIDS disaster, and its likely intersections with mainstream churches and spirituality. The Reverend Dykes gave *Star* readers an unflinching assessment of the trouble ahead:

> It [AIDS] is going to be in Australia. When I found out I was going to be the pastor of this church [in Sydney] I was more attuned to Australians visiting San Francisco and I ran into, over a three month period before I left, at least 10 men from Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide who were in San Francisco.
>
> They were there on a holiday and they were there enjoying everything that we fought for in our community as far as gay liberation and human sexuality was concerned. So there's no doubt that the chances are pretty good, from the American tourists that come to Sydney, that the disease is going to be rampant here as it is there.

Reverend Dykes urged the gay community to be prepared to look after its own physical and spiritual needs, as it had always done:

> Number one, AIDS is not a moral issue. That it's spread by sexual contact has nothing to do with morality. This is a disease issue and I want the church to be prepared to offer their support, in the sense of being with people who are going through the disease, especially for couples, because it will strike one person in a couple but not the other person; and just the paranoia and the fear that we face.
>
> Who's going to deliver food and give our support to those AIDS victims as they go through the turmoil? Are we just going to turn them over to the St Vincent's Hospital (which can be good, I know they are

> supportive and caring, and do their best to understand what we are about as gay persons). We have to learn to take care of our own. What they want to do is… make us worship a God that is not our God.

Most gay men and lesbians experience hostility in their encounters with organised religion, which is why a former Baptist minister, the Reverend Troy Perry, established the MCC in Los Angeles in 1968. Rev. Perry had himself been rejected by the Baptists because of his homosexuality, and his new church specifically attended to the spiritual needs of gay men and lesbians. The MCC very quickly found a receptive audience throughout the USA as well as in Australia. 'Jesus did not create you in order to hate you,' MCC ministers declared, to which thousands of gay men and lesbians replied: 'amen'.

The MCC and the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, together with gay Christian groups such as Acceptance, provided proof, if any were needed, that gay sexual liberation and spirituality could co-exist. Unusual juxtapositions sometimes surfaced as a result of this fact, best illustrated by the *Star's* 1983 "Giant 32-page Xmas Issue" which featured a Christmas cover photo of Glynn with his boyfriend, Steven Cribb, and four other *Star* staffers posing outside the mens' toilet in Green Park, Darlinghurst. How much do we read into Glynn's choice of location, which was a gay beat of some repute, a site of fleeting joys as well as site of violence for more than three [un]wise men?

Glynn's editorial, however, leaves us in no doubt about what this particular teacher/evangelist/editor wants for Christmas:

> Certainly, it may be difficult in our own lives to offer peace and goodwill to others. There may even be cause for 'righteous indignation' because of the attitudes and actions of others. Somewhere along the line, though, we must at least offer the hand of friendship and brotherhood. If it is rejected, the offer scorned, then we may look elsewhere for the hope and promise of relationships that we can trust and believe in.
>
> As a community, we have this year forged a fragile and growing bond that could enable us to achieve the unity that we so desperately need.
>
> In the coming year, we must lay down our knives and begin to grow in peace and love for one another. We must not allow the forces of hatred and violence to overcome us. We must, each of us, stand in the light of day and fight for our right to live and for our right to love who we please.
>
> The Christmas message is simple. It is a light to all who would listen and take heed. Let us, as individuals and as a community, work towards the spirit of unity and peace among all. From each and all of us at *The Star* we extend our best wishes for the season, the hope of joy and happiness in the coming year.

Chapter 11
When push comes to shove

News of Michael Glynn's departure from the *Star* spread quickly. Some people on the Golden Mile felt relieved. With Glynn gone, there might be a little less media interest in the shady deals that kept Oxford Street afloat. Most people, though, were surprised.

The talk among the Beresford regulars was that Glynn had been pushed. That was the only way to make sense of it, really, because wild horses wouldn't have dragged him away from his newspaper. He'd lived and breathed the *Star* since he started publishing it in 1979, first out of a tiny office at 8/43 Phillip Street in the city, near the Wentworth Hotel, and then, as the newspaper grew, out of the front room of his home, a rented terrace house at 93 Crown Street, Darlinghurst. The *Star* was his baby. He said it was his contribution to the gay community.

As it turned out, Glynn was despatched by a handful of men he considered friends. They were men with whom he'd shared a particular intimacy as co-founders of a private S/M sex club. The Club, as they imaginatively called it, held invitation-only get-togethers at hired venues around Sydney. Sometimes they met at a sauna in Kensington, other times at venues in the centre of Sydney. Who could forget one of The Club's most memorable events, a Christmas party held underneath the State Theatre, at the American Health Silhouette Spa and Gym. "We called it 'Christmas

Hang-Ups','' Glynn recalled. ''Geoff White did a beautiful poster for it: a guy hanging upside down with a candle burning out of his arse.''

Sydney was awash with opportunities for gay sex. There were leather and denim bars, discos and dance clubs, pubs, backrooms and saunas. But Glynn loved leather and S/M sex with a passion. His obsession drove him and other like-minded men such as John Gellatly to establish The Club so they could pursue their special interests with fellow travellers, without censure. But it would prove to be Glynn's undoing. ''Michael wasn't very good at separating his finances,'' according to Richard Turner, Glynn's former friend and workmate. ''He'd started to use Club funds as his own personal funds. I'm not sure how much he owed them, but I think it was quite substantial.''

Gellatly pulled Glynn aside in May 1984 and demanded he repay The Club's missing money. Glynn couldn't. He'd always run the *Star* on a shoestring budget and the only other assets he had were his looks and his reputation. Since The Club placed no monetary value on Glynn's reputation or his sex appeal there was only one gut-wrenching thing left to do. Glynn agreed to sell the *Star* to a consortium of friends and co-workers led by Paul Smith, Turner, advertising man Tony Cooper and writer Bob Hay. Together, these men set up a company called Seruse Pty Ltd and bought the *Star* from Glynn for a fortnightly license fee of $250.

Smith was appointed the new *Star*'s new editor and he used his first editorial to make the transition as smooth as possible. "Michael has decided that he must devote his energies to other tasks and he has, after much soul-searching, sold the *Star* to new owners," Smith wrote in June 1984. The Seruse buy-out coincided with *The Star's* fifth anniversary, an event that gave the new owners an opportunity to print suitably commemorative tributes to Glynn. Smith's editorial was fulsome in its praise of Glynn's legacy:

> Michael Glynn, the *Star*'s founder and until recently, editor, can testify to the fact that there are much easier ways of making one's fortune than in gay publishing. Michael had the vision to forsee that a paper like the *Star* would be vital to the growth of a gay community. At first alone, then later with the help of his lover Steven Cribb and two staff, he produced the *Star* every fortnight for five years. In all that time he had barely more than a couple of weeks' holiday. The growth and continued success of this newspaper is due almost solely to Michael's vision of a gay community and his single-minded dedication to that vision. Michael's vision and the *Star* have been almost without doubt among the greatest influences on the growth of our community.

The *Star's* capacity to pay Glynn a license fee was always a doubtful proposition. The newspaper's survival was due in no small part to Glynn's ability to minimise production costs by looking after most, if not all, of

the publishing duties. He answered the phones, he wrote content and he sourced advertisements from gay businesses around town. In the early days, he also distributed the paper, loading the latest edition into his backpack and hand-delivering it to venues along Oxford Street.
But the deal Seruse offered was good enough to get The Club off Glynn's back. And it bought time for Glynn and his boyfriend, Steven Cribb, to reassess their lives. They packed their belongings, moved out of their Crown Street terrace, and did what many Sydney gays do when they want to try a quieter and cheaper life. They moved to the Blue Mountains, two hours west of Sydney, where an annual fancy dress ball and an irregular dinner party circuit provide a good-enough alternative to the bar scene.

Things didn't work out the way they should have. Seruse folded just ten months after the *Star* buy-out.

"We couldn't afford the licence fee," said Turner. "It was partly because of AIDS but we were also in the middle of an economic crisis and the venues were being crunched. Half the town had stopped advertising with us. Danny Vadasz [who published a Melbourne magazine called *Gay Community News*] stepped in. I don't quite remember whether we approached him or he approached us, but we were both receptive to the concept of forming an alliance that would give *Gay Community News* a Sydney base and give the *Star* some financial resources."

Vadasz and the *Star* struck a deal. The Seruse directors handed ownership of the paper over to Vadasz and his partners, the *Star* became the *Sydney Star Observer*, and most of the existing editorial and advertising staff kept their jobs. Glynn, however, was left out in the cold. No Seruse, no license fee.

"Michael and I never spoke after that," said Turner.

"He thought I had stolen the *Star* from him. I remember seeing Michael at the *Star*'s 10th birthday celebrations. There was a party, and everyone who had been involved with the *Star* was invited. Michael was there and he just cut me dead. As far as he was concerned, Richard Turner stole the paper from him. He was never going to forgive me for that."

Chapter 12:
'We need to learn from the dead'

A small gay community has existed in the bohemian upper reaches of the Blue Mountains for many decades. Its members stage a fancy dress ball in Leura every Queen's Birthday weekend in June, and hold other social events throughout the year: picnics, tennis days and bushwalks, gentle past-times for those who have had their fill of Sydney's gay scene or who were never interested in it to begin with. Glynn and Cribb made the most of their new life in the mountains. They found a house with plenty of room for themselves and their dogs, grew vegetables, and befriended some of the locals. But it was a brief interlude.

Within a year of leaving Sydney, Glynn's deal with Seruse Pty Ltd to publish the *Star* under license was rendered worthless and the small income stream that Glynn had negotiated with Seruse evaporated. Seruse ceased publishing the *Star* on 25 April 1985, citing an inability to discharge its debts. A week later, the re-named *Sydney Star Observer* hit the streets, written and produced by Glynn's former workmates but owned by the Melbourne-based Gay Publications Cooperative. Glynn was infuriated by this turn of events. He felt abandoned and betrayed, and his health took a turn for the worse. A friend of Glynn's, Don Johnston, was so concerned about Glynn's affairs that he wrote a letter to the *Star*:

> On a recent visit to the Blue Mountains I was able to renew an old friendship with Michael Glynn, who helped me many years ago when I

> was coming out. It may be of some interest to your readers to know that Michael has been ill for almost a year with a serious spinal condition that has confined him to bed for most of that time.
>
> Because of his inability to return to work he has had to rely on the public hospital system, which has caused long delays in treatment. I am moving back to Queensland very soon and am concerned that someone who worked so hard for the community has been forgotten so soon by so many. I hope that you can publish this letter so that others may remember (Johnston, 1985).

Cribb's health was failing, as well. At the end of 1985, the young DJ was diagnosed with HIV and in April the following year, Cribb contracted an unusual form of tuberculosis. His was an infection so rare "that four years ago, Australian doctors only knew it from footnotes in textbooks," wrote journalist Ben Hills in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

There was little point in Glynn and Cribb staying in the Blue Mountains because the specialist care Cribb needed was at St Vincent's Hospital, in Sydney. Glynn found a place for them to rent in the city. Trips to the hospital became considerably easier but there were other problems associated with their return. Glynn and Cribbs' new neighbours in Campsie discovered the men were gay and that Cribbs had AIDS. Compassion was in short supply. Instead, said Glynn, the neighbours threw rocks onto their roof, daubed their front fence with the word "poofters", and would shout "why don't you die?"

Not much was known about AIDS treatments in 1986 and a refusal by Sydney's mortuary technicians at the time to conduct post-mortems on the bodies of people who had died with AIDS, for fear of infection, made it difficult for AIDS researchers to establish the way in which rare, AIDS-related infections worked. Cribb was adamant that his impending death should, in some way, contribute to existing knowledge about AIDS. He named Glynn as his executor and he asked that medical researchers be allowed to use his body to gain information that might help other AIDS patients. "There seems to be a lot of experimentation going on with AIDS patients," Glynn said at the time. "They try one drug to see if it works, but once the patient dies, they never know what they actually died from."

Glynn wanted to make public the impact of the mortuary technicians' ban on AIDS-related post mortems. Before Cribb died, Glynn spoke to the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s medical reporter, Chris Thomas, who in turn spoke to prominent AIDS researchers Dr David Cooper from St Vincent's Hospital and Professor John Dwyer from the Prince of Wales and Prince Henry Hospitals.

"We will need to have a post-mortem examination to know what kills him," Glynn told the *Herald*. "It will answer questions like whether the treatment doctors gave him was working. Steve only recently decided if he got well, he would start nursing, so he could help other people. To have a post-mortem examination is the last thing we can do for him. This makes me very angry and very sad."

Cooper and Dwyer agreed that Cribbs' last wish should be fulfilled. "Forty per cent of AIDS patients die from a complication that is not diagnosed before death," Professor Dwyer said. "In order to help the living, we need to learn from the dead."

In late November 1986, within a year of being diagnosed with HIV, Steven Cribb moved into the St John of God Hospice, in Burwood, to spend his last days.

"They were pumping 600 millilitres of morphine into him towards the end, but he was still in agony," Glynn recalled. "His last words were that he was fighting to stay alive and prove 'that bitch' wrong. 'That bitch' was his doctor who told him he wouldn't make it to Christmas."

On 25 November 1986, Cribb slid into a coma and died. He was 28 years old.

"When Steven and I were together I felt I could do anything and I damn near did. My visions become real. Steven empowered me. His unconditional love, our love, was the strength of our accomplishments," Glynn wrote in his diary.

"In coming together, Steven and I broke through barriers and we gave to our tribe, the gay men of Sydney.

“Steven’s genius was in selling an evening of music as a journey. He definitely intended to take you somewhere, not merely move your feet. Matching beat for beat, he could tell a story about our tribe: our feelings and our thoughts, our attitude, our pride.

“With Steven I experienced pure expressions of joy, on a dance floor as well as in those moments when it was just the two of us in our castle, when I didn’t have to share him with 500 – 5,000 other gay men.

“I wish we had spent more time together. I wish that our work hadn’t occupied us so much, that we had gone away together more, gone out to dinner together more, had more time.

“When I wake I miss him. In the night, I miss him. I am alone. Hopeless. Desolate. Forsaken.”

Chapter 13:
The last chapter

Armistead Maupin drew a sizeable crowd to the Sydney Opera House in March 2011. He was in town to promote his new novel, *Mary Ann in Autumn,* which revives many of the characters from Maupin's phenomenally successful *Tales of the City* series. Maupin read some passages from his new novel and then participated in a Q&A session about his life and work. The conversation inevitably addressed the subjects at the heart of Maupin's work: gay life, love, sex and ageing. At one point in the conversation, Maupin confessed that he had stopped writing in the 1990s because he didn't want to perpetuate the dominant gay narrative. Too many gay men were dying around him, he said, and he couldn't see a way to write about gay lives without following a narrative trajectory that ended with AIDS and death.

As I listened to Maupin I wondered how I could possibly write about Glynn without following the same narrative trajectory. Could I find a suitable ending that wasn't about AIDS? Could I play around with the chronology of Glynn's story and write about his death as one of many significant, but not necessarily sequential, episodes?

I tried ending Glynn's story on a high. An earlier version of this narrative finished with Glynn standing centre stage, microphone in hand, as Master of Ceremonies at the 1980 Mr. Leather Competition. Here was a picture of Glynn as he wanted to be seen: centre stage and in control, surrounded by leather-men and immersed in a world largely of his own making. But

that ending didn't quite work because too much happened after that moment in 1980 to make it a meaningful end point.

Glynn's fight with HIV inevitably shaped the trajectory of his last decade. After Cribb died, Glynn turned to the mainstream media again to continue his campaign to end a ban on AIDS-related autopsies. "In my grief I cry out to all Australians to stop the bias and prejudice before it is too late," he wrote in a letter to the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. "We need increased funds for education, research, hospice care, hospital beds and all the rest. None of this, however, will do any good if we do not know why people are dying. We need autopsies now."

Herald journalists would have been glad to have Glynn in their contact book. Glynn was one of the few people at the time willing to talk on the record about having HIV. He was also vocal in his concerns about conventional medical responses to AIDS. Glynn refused HIV treatment drugs, citing their toxic side effects. He told the *Herald* that he instead preferred to rely on what he called his fighting spirit. "So many people I know who have gotten sick think: 'This is it. This is the end of me. I'm going to die.' They listen to the doctors and the social workers who give you the message about getting ready to die. They point the bone at you."

Glynn was struck by AIDS-related meningitis in the early 1990s. He moved into a Housing Commission terrace in Glebe and continued to campaign on the two issues that remained close to his heart: HIV and street violence against gays. Ever the optimist, Glynn started up another newspaper, the *Harbour City*

Times partly because, he said, the *Star* had refused to publish a story he had written about long-term HIV survivors.

Glynn published *Harbour City Times* as a monthly newspaper with a $2 cover price, half of which was to be donated to the AIDS charity, the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation. "We want to promote intelligent discussion about issues which have been treated with relentless negativity elsewhere," Glynn said. "We are not about discussing the latest records, disco crazes or designer drugs. AIDS doesn't mean death, and we're trying to change the equation by looking at ways to manage it."

Harbour City Times ceased publication in April 1992, after a six-month stint. It lacked advertising support and was perceived as being too AIDS-political. Around the same time, Glynn got involved with Street Patrol, an ill-fated response to anti-gay street violence. Street Patrol volunteers, including Glynn, wore a dark uniform with a pink triangle insignia. They carried whistles and patrolled the Darlinghurst streets in a quasi-military operation.

"There was a time," Glynn wrote in his diary, "when I thought I had all the time in the world, that the eternity of youth would always be mine. I now realise that my time available in this life may soon be over.

"Sounds morbid, huh? Well, let me get straight to the point: I have AIDS. And according to the so-called 'experts', it's just a matter of time. My task is to keep pushing the clock back, to grab more time, more life.

"I am in the midst of my 5th meningitis attack in the past four years," he writes. "Meningitis attacks the brain stem and spinal cord. The resultant inflammation plays havoc with pain centres, memory, motor function, breathing, and heart rate. The list, I assume, covers the entire body.

"So this particular virus, meningitis, and the HIV infection, will together try to destroy my brain and my body? For the past four years I have lived with this. I have been sick and recovered. I believe I can live with this. Sure I'll get sick – maybe – but I can recover."

Glynn had recently made contact with his mother in America, asking if he could come home to visit.

"I am sorry," she responded, "but it just can't be. Barb [Glynn's sister] and the two boys are here all the time and we all of us just don't feel it would be safe. I know they say it (ARC)[2] [sic] or whatever is not contagious through contact but I don't believe they are 100% sure and we could not take that chance. I know this is going to make you angry, and I am truly sorry. Barb has said if you did come here, she and the boys

[2] ARC was an alternative acronym to describe the cluster of AIDS-defining illnesses experienced by people with advanced HIV infection. It stood for AIDS Related Complex.

would not come here again, and I could not do that. We really do love you and hope you keep in touch. Love, Mom."

The gay brotherhood that Glynn sought was as ephemeral as it was idealistic, built on crazy foundations of sexual freedom, drugs, music, sweat and semen. Glynn found what he was looking for with Cribb, and occasionally, in the gay clubs. Later in life, he found another version of gay brotherhood with a man called Philip Ritchie, who would become the executor of Glynn's estate and whom Glynn referred to as his blood brother.

"When Phil folds his great beautiful arms around me I feel strong and comforted. I can face anything (I think) with his love and presence. Even the horrible monster. I fear being alone. I fear the long lonely night. I fear waking to no one. I feel cut-off from the family of community. I am alone in the tribe.

"I tried to deal in good faith with the community and individuals and then felt knives in my back. We all have something to contribute. Why does the political infighting and intrigue continue? Can't we reach common ground on all questions and work with a common purpose towards the goal of slowing down the dying – even stopping it?"

Glynn's sexual identity and his experiences of family impelled him to look for sustaining narratives about sex, love and belonging. Gay

consciousness and gay community were concepts that enabled Glynn to locate and name his place in the world, and his fascination with S/M sex and leather were part of that process of personal world-making.

When the Al Pacino film *Cruising* was released in Sydney, in June 1980, the *Sydney Morning Herald* went looking for comment from the local gay community. The *Herald* knew that gay activists in San Francisco and New York had picketed *Cruising* because of its sensational portrayal of gay men and S/M leather sex, and the newspaper wanted to know if Sydneysiders could expect similarly angry protests. The *Herald* found Glynn, who refused to be outraged. Instead, he reassured *Herald* readers that people into leather and S/M sex were well adjusted, pursuing consensual sexual fantasies.

"People into leather were more adjusted to themselves and their sexuality," he said. "Everyone has sex fantasies but a lot of people have tension because society places such a taboo on these fantasies. Those in the leather scene get a chance to work out their fantasies, even if it is simply dressing in leather because they like the feel of it."

Glynn spoke openly about his involvement in S/M sex because he wanted to challenge stereotypes about acceptable sexual identities. For this reason, it made absolute sense for him to publish in the *Star* Pat Califia's call to arms, *What is Gay Liberation?* "Lesbians and gays are not just like everybody else," Califia wrote, "and we should stop apologising for it."

On 10 July 1996, Michael Glynn died from AIDS. His obituary, written by Gary Dunne, ran in the *Star* the following week. It appears here, in full, because it achieves something I thought couldn't be done. It connects Glynn's ending to a community's beginning.

"A lanky American with no shortage of attitude and chutzpah, Glynn played a significant role in the history of the Sydney gay community from 1979 onwards.

"He published the first issue of the *Sydney Star* on 6 July 1979. It was a 16-page pamphlet. By 1984, when he stepped down as editor and publisher, the paper (renamed *The Star*) had grown to its current tabloid size. The paper later changed its name to the *Star Observer* then the *Sydney Star Observer*.

"Glynn was closely involved in the homosexual law reform campaign, battles over the nature and timing of Mardi Gras, the establishment of both the first Gay Business Association and the Mr. Leather competition. He was behind the push to send a team (which included Bobby Goldsmith, who won 17 medals) to the first Gay Olympics in 1982.

"Glynn passionately believed in the notion of a gay community based around a common lifestyle and identity. He regularly published local political, cultural and social news. In 1981 he printed the first reference in any Australian newspaper to what later became known as HIV/AIDS.

“By his own reckoning, Glynn had probably been living with HIV since the late ’70s. In 1986, following the AIDS-related death of his lover, Steve Cribb, he went public about his own positive HIV status. For the past ten years Glynn had been involved in campaigning for Street Patrol, the publishing of *Harbour City Times*, the push to give AIDS-related poverty a higher profile, and the promotion of the notion of managing HIV infection with the right combination of meditation, diet, nutrition and exercise.

“A feisty, long-term survivor, Glynn made both friends and enemies easily. Over the past week, those friends and enemies have joined in paying tribute to Michael Glynn as a founding parent of both this paper and this community.”

Ends

Epilogue

If you had to fit your most valued possessions into a shoebox, what would you include? Photos and jewellery? Legal documents and passport? Perhaps a letter or birthday card with sentimental value?

People who live in high-risk bushfire areas or other potential disaster zones are familiar with such questions. They would have heard, if not necessarily heeded, advice from authorities to prepare a survival kit: spare batteries, a torch, and emergency contact numbers. Important documents, valuables and photos, we're told, should be kept in a waterproof bag.

When you stop and think about it, the act of selecting the bits and pieces of our lives that we want to keep safe forces us to recognise that many of the things we value – our emotional connections, our material security, our spiritual selves – are either too unwieldy to cram into a shoebox or can be preserved as memories if we keep just one small reminder of the whole.

The idea of a survival kit matters, though, because it preserves some of the things we wish to hand on to our beneficiaries. Grandfather's gold watch, perhaps, or an original birth certificate. A letter or story. The survival kit enables our presence to continue beyond death. It continues the conversation. It says, 'I was here'.

Michael Glynn was acutely aware of this, as are many others who confront their mortality because they live in the natural disaster zones defined by terminal illness or old age. In his final years, Glynn began a diary so that he could tell his story in his own words. He knew he had probably waited too long to get this project underway, and he confessed to being horrified by the impact that meningitis was having on his sentence construction and grammar, but he pressed on regardless: "I've held onto this NEED [sic] to tell my story for far too long," his first diary entry records.

In December 2011, just one year out from the expected completion date of my thesis on Glynn and the *Star*, I received an extraordinary gift: Michael Glynn's survival kit. It was, literally, a dark blue shoebox, no more than 34cm long and 13cm deep. Glynn's final diary was inside this shoebox, together with a collection of letters from significant friends and family, photos, postcards, chapters from an unfinished novel, Glynn's last will and testament, and most endearingly, a farewell note to Philip Ritchie, his 'blood brother'.

"Goodbye. God bless. I love you," Glynn wrote to Ritchie. "P.S. Dance on my grave!"

For a biographer, this shoebox was pure gold. I had heard of its existence during conversations with Glynn's friends, and it became something of a holy grail. I initially thought it was mythical, or at least long lost. I didn't

fancy my chances of tracking it down, let alone being given unrestricted access to its contents. But after making further enquiries, I established that Glynn's executor and blood brother, Philip Ritchie, had the shoebox in safe keeping. By coincidence, Ritchie and I had met each other more than 20 years earlier through a mutual friend. I had no knowledge then of Ritchie's relationship with Glynn, nor any inkling that I would one day ask to be entrusted with such intimate treasure. But I am forever grateful to Michael Glynn and Philip Ritchie and to the gods of good fortune for ensuring that the tenuous threads of connection finally entwined.

The only problem was, now that I had Glynn's survival kit, what the hell would I do with it? I had spent the past three years trawling through the *Star* archives and interviewing Glynn's peers to construct a version of Glynn's life story that I felt was consistent with the available records. My academic supervisors had approved my methodology and the university had certified the ethics of my fieldwork. In other words, I had met the academic requirements of doctoral research and written a version of Glynn's life that worked perfectly well within the acceptable research parameters.

But what if Glynn's shoebox told a different story to the one deemed academically acceptable? One possible solution was to put the shoebox aside. I could return to this source material at another time, and write a more intimate version of Glynn's life for a different audience.

That idea sounded attractive but I knew instinctively that Glynn and Ritchie's gift was intended to further the telling of Glynn's story. Otherwise, why put the survival kit together in the first place, and why give it to a journalist such as myself with no commitments asked for or granted? I also knew, instinctively, that this new material had to be incorporated into my thesis, no matter what. Episodes could be re-written. Conclusions altered. Story lines could go in entirely new directions, if needs be. Given that I wanted to tell Glynn's story as best I could, it would be remiss to do anything but make good use of this gift.

Nevertheless, the discovery of Glynn's shoebox draws our attention to core questions about the construction of life stories. It reminds us of how the sources of biographical information materially shape the telling of a life story; how serendipity and coincidence play their part; and how multiple points of view make it impossible to assign a single and reliable meaning to shared memories and events.

And if we can consider the shoebox as a kind of curated text, we might also consider what's not included. The semiotician Karin Wahl-Jorgensen (2006, p. 201) alerts us to the silences and exclusions that inevitably exist with something like Glynn's shoebox, because once we open the lid and look inside we are accessing traces of activity rather than absences. "This is a methodological problem, but also a normative one," Wahl-Jorgensen notes. "We cannot see who is excluded and how and why such exclusion occurs."

Caveats aside, much of the material Glynn chose to store brings to mind not so much absences *within* the box, but the silences in Glynn's public narrative about his private life. Glynn spoke rarely about his biological family. And when he did, it was less than truthful. For example, Glynn gave Richard Turner to believe that his father was in the army, and this might have served as a convenient explanation for the silence between father and son.

"One of the things Michael and I had in common was that we were military brats," Turner said in an interview I conducted with him, before the shoebox surfaced. "I got the impression that Michael came to Australia as a draft dodger, and that his father was very harsh and very disappointed that Michael was gay. In fact maybe he even disowned Michael."

I took Turner's comments in the same good faith in which they were offered. In the absence of any different information, they took on the trappings of fact and I mistakenly presented them as such in an earlier version of this narrative. I had figured that in 1971, Glynn was the right age to be drafted into America's war in Vietnam, and then assumed that Glynn must have done what I would have done had I been saddled with a military father who expected me to fight the Vietcong. I would have bolted to the other side of the world. This is the way we bring our own fears and experiences into play, allowing them to colour the story.

What to make, then, of the black and white photo in Glynn's shoebox of someone called Shawn Masters, billed as the "World's Most Fantastic Hypnotist"? The photo, and the extraordinary claim to fame, was printed on a small, cream-coloured brochure that advertised the Shawn Masters Show, Sunday thru Thursday, $1.50, at the Villa Marina Restaurant overlooking Beautiful Balboa Bay.

I put that question aside for a moment and lingered instead over Glynn's American passport, issued in May 1970. It confirmed Glynn's age (22 years old), height (6 feet 2 inches), hair colour (brown) and eyes (hazel). The passport photo showed a handsome young man with long side-burns and a puppy-fat face. Weirdly, though, the construction of Glynn's face and the look in his eye seemed remarkably similar to the man in the Shawn Masters brochure. But no, that can't be ...

Then I started reading a letter from Glynn to his half brother, and it became apparent that the pseudonymous Shawn Masters was none other than Glynn's father, no more a military man than Glynn was. He was a showman. What's more, father and son travelled together to Australia in 1971 to perform the Shawn Masters Show in a long-gone nightclub in Coogee. Theirs was a brief reunion that promised so much but ended badly, for reasons Glynn refused to discuss.

Soon after he left the *Star*, Glynn tried his hand at writing a novel. It's not especially good, and only one unfinished chapter survives him, but it nevertheless confirms the fact that Glynn viewed his life as a story worth telling.

"I began the beguine, the dance of life, on a cold windswept morning in April 1948," he wrote in this unfinished novel. "Getting born is easy. Staying alive is the trick. Somehow my mother and I made it to New York City the year after I was born. Why New York and not California, I'll never know. I often wonder whether I would be as deranged as I am, or more so, if I had grown-up in sun-drenched California. The narrow canyons of metropolis never did suit me, and years later, when I became of age to test my own wings, I flew north to a very proper Boston which became jumping off place for the long journey to the land Down Under. But I'm getting ahead of myself."

Most of the people I interviewed during my research for this thesis described Glynn as an angry man. But they were unable to pinpoint the source of this anger, or understand why Glynn was so volatile. Glynn was short-tempered and often self-righteous. His editorials in the *Star* feel as they were written by a preacher and delivered as sermons from the mount. So it was unsurprising to discover that Glynn's father, the hypnotist showman Shawn Masters, had become a self-styled minister of religion in his later years.

Unquestionably, Glynn's adult life was shaped by his commitment to the *Star*, his love for Steven Cribb and later, for Philip Ritchie, his passion for leather, and his search for a gay brotherhood. As I sifted through the shoebox and became aware of the intimate details of Glynn's life, I imagined I now understood some of the anger that coursed through this man. As one of Glynn's peers theorised, Glynn's life was an "oedipal explosion" triggered by his father's abandonment and his mother's rejection. That may well be so. The shoebox is a collection of fragments that invite interpretation and suggest possible meanings.

Throughout this thesis, I have used Warner's theory of counterpublics to help articulate the significance of the world Glynn helped create. I also drew on Lawson's conceptualisation of the *Bulletin* as a work of intimate entanglement between its editor and readers. So I turn once more to Warner and Lawson to help me articulate a connection between theory and practice that lies at the heart of this thesis.

Warner's view of the kind of public display of sex and sexuality that Glynn embraced so avidly through the *Star*, and in his personal life, points us towards the idea of transformation. "It is often thought," Warner writes, "especially by outsiders, that the public display of private matters is a debased narcissism, a collapse of decorum, expressivity gone amok, the erosion of any distinction between public and private. But in a counterpublic setting, such display often has the aim of transformation" (Warner, 2002, p. 62). In *The Archibald Paradox*, Lawson also points us

towards the idea of transformation by using a circus analogy to describe the *Bulletin*'s editorial style. "The *Bulletin,*" she writes, "was a parade of expressive tricks and marvels, a whole print circus" … and its editor was "a circus master" (1987, p. xviii).

I think of Glynn as a circus master. He gathered together a colourful parade of narratives about gay life and sex, death and spirituality, community and rights, political power and street violence, love, family, morality and privacy. He published and circulated these narratives, articulating the swirl and colour, the noise and magic and smell of the Sydney gay scene. His newspaper was like a circus big top that covered a world in creation. It was transformative. Individuals became community members; homosexual outsiders became sexual citizens with civil rights and responsibilities, political goals and spiritual dimensions. As ringleader, preacher and Master of Ceremonies, Michael Glynn stood at the centre of this world-making project.

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