



New South Wales

Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ hate crimes

Statement of Barry Charles

14 November 2022

This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I would be prepared, if necessary, to give to the Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ hate crimes as a witness. The statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

1. My name is Barry Charles.
2. I am 72 years old and a gay man. I have spent many years of my life as an activist for the gay rights and gay liberation movement. I was also what some may refer to as a “beat queen” – that is, somebody who used beats regularly and was very immersed in gay social life.

Growing up in Punchbowl

3. I was born in 1950 in Punchbowl and lived there until I came out to my family in September 1972. Since then, I have lived either in the Inner West or Eastern Suburbs, including Glebe, Darlinghurst, Bondi Junction, Randwick and Surry Hills.
4. Punchbowl was a working class suburb, and my family was also working class. I was the first person in my extended family to get a chance to go to university.
5. I certainly knew I was gay from about 1967, when I was 16 or 17-years-old, although maybe had an idea from as young as 14. But growing up in these suburbs, I was unable to do anything about it or meet any other gay people in a “normal” social gathering.
6. I knew that there were some other gay people around. For example, when I was 17 years old, I recall my dad referring to the guy next door as a “cat”. “Cat” is an old-school slang term for a homosexual. It’s a kind of cheeky term, it refers to tomcats sneaking out at night for sex. The guy that lived next door was about five years older than me and I figured out he was gay back then, but I never felt we could talk about it.
7. Some of the movies and television shows I saw growing up included gay people. Gay men were always shown in a very negative light, of course – but they had the unintended effect of showing me that gay communities and a gay social scene existed.
8. For example, I remember watching an old movie called *Advise and Consent*, in which there was a subplot about a US Senator being blackmailed for having sex with one of his navy buddies in World War II and ultimately committing suicide. In one scene, the Senator went to a gay bar. Even though the movie was intended as a negative portrayal of gay subcultures, it showed me

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there was such a thing as a “gay bar”. The problem was, as a young man growing up in Punchbowl, I had no idea where you would find such a bar!

9. I didn’t “come out” to my parents until after 1972, after I had already come out to most of my friends. My parents discovered I was gay by accident, but thankfully at that time I was ready. I had been at university and basically had a 3,000-word essay ready to hand to my mother about gay history and politics. There was a lot of very nasty stuff said, and I was estranged from my mother for about 6 months.
10. Eventually, she reached out to me after having a conversation with my grandfather. He had apparently said to her that he and my grandmother had known for years that I was gay. My mother told me that he said, “Don’t worry about it, I saw a lot of it during the war in New Guinea, he’ll grow out of it.” I’ve always found that quite funny.

Discovering beats

11. While as a young man from Punchbowl I had no idea how to find a gay bar, beats were something I could find. Beats were gay men’s way of connecting, congregating and having sex when you couldn’t go to more “normal” social gatherings.
12. After I left school in 1968, I worked for 5 or 6 years at an accounting firm in the city. One day in January 1969, when I was 18 years old, I went to the old Anthony Hordern building on George Street, where one of our clients was based. I went out at lunch and used one of the old toilets inside the building. The toilet was a grand marble toilet, like the ones that still exist in the Queen Victoria Building. When I saw the graffiti on the wall, I immediately understood that this was the kind of place that if you hung around, something would happen. And it did.
13. I came out of a cubicle and a man was standing there. He was about 30 perhaps. He was very nervous but I approached him and we engaged with each other briefly. This was my first adult sexual experience.
14. I started going to that beat regularly, and I realised there were other beats around. Eventually, people I would meet at beats would share a few tips, saying things like, “have you tried this place” or “you should go here.” Not that there was much communication, just a few words. Slowly I discovered more about the beats that existed, and going to beats became a pattern of behaviour for me. By 1971, when I got a car, I would go all over the suburbs to different beats.
15. A few years ago I made a list of as many beats that I could remember having gone to between 1969 and 1998, which is the period in which I was frequently using beats. I have provided that list to the Inquiry, but it is not publicly available, noting the safety concerns for users of the beats that remain active.
16. Even though it was “criminal” to use beats, what we as gay men were doing by using beats is instinctive human sexuality. We’ve been treated as outcasts and criminals, in some cases for centuries, but we’re still going to be whoever we are. So, the effect of the laws criminalising us was for gay people to develop our own culture and ways of associating. I think of beats as showing our “indomitable spirit”.
17. I remember reading a story in an American queer magazine called the *Advocate*, about two men in the mid-West who had been apprehended in a “lover’s lane” situation, having sex in a car. They were taken to a police station, but due to some oversight or mistake were placed in

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the same cell. When a police officer came to check on them, there they were again, having sex right there in the police cell! “There it was”, I remember thinking, “our indomitable spirit!”

18. At beats, sex was the number one objective. Men didn’t go there to make friends or find a partner (although that is something I did on a few occasions). Most sex was not only anonymous, but virtually wordless. Most men wanted to get it over and done with as quickly as possible – hanging around for longer than necessary was dangerous, because you knew could be apprehended, or were in danger of violence, and some men were at risk of being exposed as gay.
19. Some of the dangers came from “bashers.” At paragraphs [118]-[160] below I outline some of the violence that I witnessed or experienced myself at beats. But I also heard about violence from other beat users.
20. It also wasn’t safe to take anyone home. There was a general awareness among regular beat users that if you did, you might be robbed, blackmailed or violently assaulted. You also knew there might be people who weren’t comfortable with their own sexuality, and then would react aggressively or violently after sex. But I have been very careful about these things from the beginning.

Police awareness of beats, and presence at beats

21. From my earliest experiences dating from 1969, there was a knowledge that police would visit beats; we heard stories of past events from older gay men. This meant that one was always careful and alert to the possibility of police presence.
22. There was also talk of young officers being assigned to going to beats as a kind of initiation or “hazing”.
23. In the Australian context, my understanding was that police stakeouts at beats, and police acting as “agents provocateurs”, were more common in earlier times i.e. 1930s to the 1950s. In my experience, such conduct was less common by the 1970s, at least in Sydney, although my understanding is that it continued to be prevalent in the UK and particularly the USA.
24. However, police presence at beats was still very much in evidence in Sydney.
25. Some personal experiences that illustrate this are the following:
 - a. Between 1971-72 I frequented a beat at Collaroy Beach on Sydney’s Northern Beaches. One Friday night, around midnight, I was in one of several cubicles and there was a man in the adjacent one. Everyone, including police, would have been aware that the two stalls were connected by a “glory hole”. I heard a heavy sounding vehicle pulling up outside. One developed almost a sixth sense for anticipating trouble. I quickly made my way out and was passed near the doorway by a young officer who rushed into the cubicle and jumped up onto the toilet to look over the wall into the next occupied stall. I continued to leave and a more senior officer outside, standing next to a “paddy wagon”, stopped and interrogated me about what I was doing there. I explained that I had been out with a friend and was on my way home, it was a long drive, and I just needed to use the toilet. I was told not to hang around these places at night or I would get into trouble with police. My name and address were taken down.
 - b. In the same time period I visited Ramsgate, another well-known cruising spot on the beachfront. There was an almost identical situation as the above incident at Collaroy

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Beach. I heard a noise outside and moved out quickly. A young officer rushed in, and I heard the sound of the cubicle doors been knocked or kicked open. Once again, I gave my name and address and was told not to be seen there again.

- c. Another incident occurred in 1973. I had gone to dinner at my parents' house in Punchbowl with my house mate, who was a close friend from UNSW Gay Liberation, and we were driving home to Glebe. We talked about my beat activities. My friend had never engaged in that sort of thing but was curious about how it all worked. The trip home passed several spots in the Inner West. I pulled the car up in William Street across from the toilet block in Pioneer's Memorial Park, Leichhardt with the intention of going in just to illustrate to my friend how easy it was to find someone there. Before I could get out of the car, an unmarked police car pulled up right behind us, and four officers got out. They took my friend to the front of the car and me to the back. We were required to empty our pockets, give our addresses and were separately asked how we knew each other. I suppose the police thought I had just picked him up at the park. I took it all in my stride, but my friend was very upset. Luckily our stories matched and my excuse for just needing the toilet stuck. Once again, we were warned off and threatened with arrest if we were seen there again. For me it was just the way things were.

26. There were several other similar situations, the specifics of which I now cannot actually recall. But I do have a recollection of being stopped by police in South Dowling Street at Moore Park as late as the mid-1990s.

Attending university and the start of gay activism

27. While I was working at the accounting firm, I decided to study commerce part-time at the University of New South Wales (UNSW). But I was never a very good student, because political activism, and reading about things outside of commerce, consumed all my time.
28. Very early on, I started to read all about the history of our *Crimes Act 1900* and how we imported it without debate from England, where the laws against homosexuality had been used to prosecute Oscar Wilde. I knew that police were a danger to gay men, that we were at risk of being arrested and imprisoned, particularly if you went to beats.
29. I learned that under our criminal law, "the abominable act of buggery" carried a longer term of imprisonment than armed robbery – so we as gay people were apparently seen as more serious criminals than armed robbers. From my perspective, that shaped my awareness of how we were treated by police.
30. I also wanted to try and understand myself as a gay man, where I came from and how I came to be. I started to read through psychiatric and psychology textbooks. What I read was that we were sick, psychologically dysfunctional individuals.
31. The law, the medical profession, the church – all major social structures – were telling us we were evil, sick, or criminal.
32. I knew all of this needed to change, and I had all of this built-up energy and knowledge wanting to help change it.
33. In late 1970, I read an ad about a new group that was starting called CAMP, or the Campaign Against Moral Persecution. In early 1971, there was an advertisement in *Tharunka*, the UNSW

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student newspaper, saying that there would be a CAMP meeting at UNSW. I immediately knew that I wanted to be involved.

34. I turned up to the very first CAMP meeting held at UNSW at the Roundhouse on a Thursday night at 7pm. There were only two other people that attended that night – Phillip Ryan and Terry McCafferty. The three of us became the founding members of UNSW Campus CAMP. Phillip became the President and Terry became the Secretary.
35. In the first year of UNSW Campus CAMP, as it was known, we held a discussion forum attended by Anne Deveson, the journalist and social commentator who was in favour of law reform. An anti-reform member of parliament also spoke at that forum. At that time both the left and right of politics were very negative towards gay rights – there was no prospect at that stage of any changes to the laws passing through Parliament.
36. Gay rights activism was growing at the universities. For example, in about 1971, a group of off-campus activists staged demonstration where they dumped sheep brains on the floor of the foyer of a Professor of Psychology at the university who was one of the nation's leading proponents of aversion therapy. They were making the point that he was treating gay people just like reprogrammable sheep.
37. UNSW Campus CAMP kept growing, and at one point we had 20 to 30 people coming to meetings. Sydney University also had a CAMP branch, and we would go to each other's events, as well as to the wider CAMP meetings.
38. In 1972, both Phillip Ryan and Terry McCafferty graduated, and I became the Secretary of the UNSW Campus CAMP.
39. In 1973, when I was still secretary, we transformed the UNSW Campus CAMP into the UNSW Gay Liberation (**Gay Lib**) movement. This was driven by various internal conflicts or differences of perspective as to how CAMP should run. There were some older members of CAMP whose preference was to sit down with lawyers, try to lobby the Law Society, gradually change politicians' views, and so on. Then there were others that thought we needed a more radical approach, and to see ourselves as part of a wider liberation movement that was connected with women's rights, workers' rights, aboriginal rights, and so on. I tried to straddle both groups.
40. UNSW Gay Lib became a really active group, on and off campus. We joined all the various demonstrations around Sydney, doing what was in those days called a "zap" and might today be called a flash mob. For example, in 1973 we organised a demonstration in Martin Place where a crowd of people "spontaneously" formed a circle and started singing and chanting.
41. Craig Johnston and John Storey were important figures in the gay liberation movement. I took photos of them at the zap in Martin Place in 1973 (SCOI.77368).
42. We also engaged with trade unions. Craig Johnston, Brian McGahen and I went to Newcastle to give a talk at the trade union club in Newcastle about the gay liberation movement.
43. I remained as Secretary of UNSW Gay Lib until 1975, throughout which time the gay rights movement kept growing.

The 1973 demonstration

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44. By 1973, there were events to commemorate the Stonewall Uprising going on around the world. The local gay rights and gay lib groups decided to show solidarity with the gay people of the world, and show that we were part of this worldwide movement, by hosting a rally. This took place in Sydney on 15 September 1973.
45. At that time, you couldn't get a permit to march, but you were allowed to have a rally on the steps of Town Hall, which we did. A number of my close friends and fellow activists spoke, including Craig Johnston, Brian McGahen and Lance Gowland.
46. We had decided to march down to the intersection of George Street and Martin Place in order to lay a wreath at the war memorial, to commemorate gay and lesbian service people. However, as we started to move off the steps of Town Hall, the police told us, "You're not going up George Street, you must go straight to Hyde Park." Police began pushing people back onto the pavement, and arresting people with force.
47. There were plain clothes police officers in the crowd and mingling amongst us. I realised this when a man in a blue raincoat, who had been amongst the crowd on the pavement, joined in with the uniformed police and began pushing protestors back once we attempted to march down George Street.
48. The officer in the raincoat then kned Brian McGahen in the groin, bringing him to the ground. I believe McGahen was targeted as a well-known left-wing activist who had spoken at the rally.
49. One of the leaders, who had experience with protests, shouted "Pitt Street!". At that time, Pitt St was still for vehicles, it wasn't a mall. We ran through the traffic on Pitt Street towards Martin Place until we reached the steps of the GPO Building. Only about 100 of us made it that far – a number had been arrested before we got there.
50. There was a standoff at the GPO Building. We stood on those steps and there was lots of screaming and chanting, and then eventually we made a break for it to sprint to Hyde Park.
51. The police chased us and again began arresting people. I ran all the way to Elizabeth Street, but I was aware of people being grabbed around me.
52. The police behaviour that I saw was very traumatic for me. I regarded it as brutality. I was only a young man at the time, 23 years old. I carried the emotional scars from that event for a long time.

Visit to USA

53. I took a step back from gay activism for a while and put time into my own relationships. I had met a guy at the beat at Rushcutters Bay, and once we had met up a few times there I felt safe enough with him to go back to his unit in Elizabeth Bay. We eventually moved in together, and he became the centre of my life for some time.
54. He was an American schoolteacher. In January 1977 he moved back to the United States, and in 1978 I arranged to go and see him in the US.
55. My trip to the US was eye opening. I saw what was possible and what we didn't have here in Sydney – a supportive community, a "ghetto" but on our own terms.
56. At the time in Sydney, there were gay and lesbian venues, but the suspicion amongst the community was that many of these were run by underworld figures who had the connections to bribe the police to keep the clubs open.

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57. This was what it used to be like in the United States, when for example the Stonewall Inn had been operated by the mafia, which meant that police would routinely raid it. But that had changed by the time that I was there. Even though homosexuality was still outlawed in the State of New York, New York City operated in reality as a law unto itself. The gay bars in Greenwich Village and on Christopher Street all operated openly, and many were run by the gay community. It was the same in San Francisco along Castro Street.
58. But while I saw many advances for the gay community in parts of the US, I also saw the backlash that was on – the religious right was coming back hard, led by Anita Bryant (an anti-gay crusader) and Jerry Falwell (a televangelist). While I was in San Francisco, an anti-discrimination law in Oregon had just been reversed by a “citizen’s initiative”.
59. I was in my hotel room in San Francisco when I saw the CBS news report on this development. The report said that there was a demonstration forming on the corner of Castro Street and Market Street. I went straight there and met the crowd. There were three or four thousand people who had also turned up to this spontaneous demonstration, which was led by none other than Harvey Milk. Sadly, he would be killed a matter of months later.
60. My time in the US showed me what was possible in terms of social life and political activism. It re-energised me to get back involved with activism when I returned to Australia.

First Mardi Gras

61. Shortly after I got home, I went out to Oxford Hotel in Taylor Square with a group of friends, all former activists, who told me that they were organising an event as part of *Stonewall Commemoration Week*. This event was to become the first Mardi Gras on 24 June 1978
62. The plan was to have a march down Oxford Street, and be more of a party than a political rally. The idea behind it was to get people to come out of the bars and to stand up for themselves.
63. I was informed by friends that this parade had a permit. Permits had been made possible, as I understood it, by amendments to the *Summary Offences Act* made by the Wran Government. I understood that the permit allowed us to meet in Green Park, move across Taylor Square, work down Oxford Street into Hyde Park and then disperse.
64. That first Mardi Gras was a terrible experience. The day had started out wonderfully. There were more people than we expected – it started with 600 of us, but more people joined in. The chant was “Out of the bars, into the streets” – and people came. It felt like our numbers must have doubled.
65. Halfway down Oxford Street, it became clear things weren’t working out. We were much bigger in numbers than expected. My impression was that Police were not ready for the level of traffic disruption, and they were especially not ready for this demonstration of how big the gay rights movement was.
66. By the time we got to the corner of Crown Street, we had police beside us and a number of paddy wagons behind us, pushing us to go faster. Our march was blocking a lane of traffic (as was allowed by our permit), and we started copping abuse from people in cars. Police began to push us off the street and onto the footpath, but we couldn’t all fit on the footpath.
67. At the bottom of Oxford Street, police stopped the truck that was leading the parade and dragged out and arrested the driver, Lance Gowland, who was a leader of the movement at the

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- time. Police formed a ring across the entrance to Hyde Park, and were announcing over the loud-speaker “disperse now” and “you’re not going to Hyde Park.”
68. The problem was, they were telling us to disperse, but there were police in front of us blocking Hyde Park, and police behind us blocking Oxford Street. They had their truncheons out. We were caught in a pincer move.
 69. Someone quick-thinking yelled out “To the Cross!” and a whole lot of people ran down College Street. That was the only realistic option – the only other choices were to stand in Oxford Street where police had truncheons out and face getting beaten, or make an escape through a backstreet if you could.
 70. I ran along College Street. A female police officer with a truncheon was after me, but I ducked away behind a parked car across from Sydney Grammar School. The officer chased an easier target instead. I rolled under a car and stayed there until the crowd moved up William Street. I then walked to Oxford Street. There were small groups of people in Stanley Street and Francis Street who had also dropped out.
 71. I had a panic attack and flashbacks of 1973. I could not do anything but make my way home.
 72. Apart from the arrest of Lance Gowland and my own encounter, I didn’t witness most of the police actions. The “main event” took place in Darlington Road, Kings Cross, which I did not reach. I heard about the arrests, and the accounts of what was described as police brutality, in the following days.

The campaign for de-criminalisation

73. From 1978 onwards, after the first Mardi Gras, there was a real sense of a gay “community”. The police heavy-handedness, while terrible, worked to the advantage of the movement – it was like a red rag to a bull. We realised as a community that we could speak up for ourselves, and needed to speak up for ourselves, but that we could only do that when we were united.
74. Two weeks after the first Mardi Gras, there was another rally demanding change, at which more people were arrested.
75. The gay scene became more visible, and we had our “ghetto” – the “Golden Mile” along Oxford Street from Hyde Park to Paddington. The gay community began to gravitate to the Eastern Suburbs. We began to be more open about what our demands as a community were.
76. This increasing confidence created a reaction. During this period, in the early 1980s, our growing visibility also meant growing violence against us.
77. In October 1980, Lex Watson and Craig Johnston set up the Gay Rights Lobby. I was one of the early members. There were only about 10 or 12 of us, but all of us had significant experience of political activism.
78. Lex Watson, who is now deceased, was the real mover and shaker. He was a senior lecturer in Government at the University of Sydney, a co-convenor of CAMP from 1972, and really knew how government processes worked and how to get change.
79. The Gay Rights Lobby increasingly worked on trying to influence those politicians who were more willing to make some change, and lobbying for law reform. Antony Green, now the ABC election analyst, was also a member of the Gay Rights Lobby. He was very knowledgeable about

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who we might best approach – who didn't need to worry about going against their electorate and who was brave enough to support gay rights.

80. We knew, for example, that the then-Premier Neville Wran was quietly on our side when it came to law reform, but that he had to get his party membership on side. The Labor Party (ALP) had Catholic traditions and a strong Trade Union base, and some in the ALP were just as antagonistic to us as the religious right.
81. In March 1981, a bill was introduced to amend the *Crimes Act 1900* that would create the offence of sexual assault without consent carrying a penalty of 7 years. Meanwhile, the penalty for freely consenting gay male sexual activity remained up to 14 years imprisonment.
82. In April 1981, George Petersen MP, a member of the Labor Party, tried to introduce amendments to the bill that would remove this anomaly. Petersen was a real maverick politician, a long-term activist on civil liberties and a great ally to the gay rights movement. The Gay Rights Lobby held a rally outside Parliament to support his amendments, which 400 people attended. However, his amendments failed to win the support of the Labor Party, and were not even debated in the Legislative Assembly.
83. In November 1981, Petersen introduced a homosexual law reform bill. The Gay Rights Lobby held a rally 800 strong to show support for the bill. As drafted, the bill proposed an equal age of consent for homosexual and heterosexual relationships. However, Michael Knight MP, Member for Campbelltown, had proposed amendments that would create an unequal age of consent, that would likely be adopted if the bill passed. The question of whether to compromise on unequal age of consent in order to get law reform through split the Gay Rights Lobby, but we ultimately voted to confirm a policy of equality. The bill was defeated.
84. In January 1982, the Gay Rights Lobby, the Gay Solidarity Group, the Gay Business Association, the Gay Counselling Service and other groups came together to form the Homosexual Law Reform Coalition in NSW. Disparate elements of the community came together to lobby politicians, to talk to their local members, and to get change through. There were people coming to rallies that were not your usual activists and would never have come to events like that in their life. The movement and our visibility kept growing.
85. In February 1982, I was elected as Co-Convenor of the Gay Rights Lobby, along with Robert French. I stayed in that position until 1984.
86. In 1982, Barrie Unsworth, a member of the Labor Party and the leader of the Upper House, introduced a bill that was aimed at getting acceptance from the right-wing of the Labor Party. It was a bill that would decriminalise homosexual acts between consenting adults in private. But under this proposed law, "buggery" would still be a crime that police could charge gay men with, and the burden would be on the accused to prove that the behaviour was in private.
87. Again, the debate about whether to support or oppose the Unsworth Bill split the Gay Rights Lobby, but ultimately we decided to oppose the bill and called for its defeat. In March 1982 we held a rally against the bill, and nearly 600 people attended.
88. We were assisted in opposing the bill by Elisabeth Kirkby, an actress who had become a member of the Australian Democrats, in the Legislative Council. However, the bill was ultimately defeated in the Legislative Assembly.

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89. In July 1982, Robert French and I, as co-convenors of the Gay Rights Lobby met with Police Minister Peter Anderson about the increasing violence against the gay community, and in particular the behaviour of the Darlinghurst Police. To our great surprise, Mr Anderson indicated his empathy with the community, particularly after he had seen what could be done in San Francisco. He said he was trying to change the culture in the police force, but without law reform there was very little chance of success. I suggested the creation of a Police-Gay Liaison Committee, like they had in San Francisco. He was familiar with that initiative.
90. The Homosexual Law Reform Coalition continued to broaden its activities. Particularly once we had the Gay Business Association onboard, which had connections with the conservative side of politics, we felt we had some chance of lobbying the Liberal Party.
91. At the same time as we were campaigning for decriminalisation, we were holding public meetings and consultations with the Anti-Discrimination Board for inclusion of homosexuality as a ground for discrimination in anti-discrimination laws. In 1982, we held a rally outside Parliament calling for changes to the anti-discrimination laws, which was attended by Fred Miller MP, member for Bligh. An amendment to the *Anti-Discrimination Act* was passed by the Wran government in 1982.
92. In January 1983, there was a raid by Darlinghurst Police on a club on Oxford Street called Club 80. My impression was that this was a reaction, on the part of some police officers, to the growing visibility of the gay movement and the attempt by some political and police leaders to change the culture within police.
93. Club 80 was a sex-on-premises venue that had operated at various locations in Sydney. By 1983. Club 80 was operating on Oxford Street, Paddington, opposite the Palace Verona Cinema, where Berkelouw Books is now located. It was run by an American-educated Australian, who had started opening the types of venues that he knew had been popular in the US.
94. Club 80 was extremely popular in Sydney. You would pay a fee to enter, but that was for access to the facilities, and you could independently engage in sex with other people that you met there.
95. As part of the raid, the police paraded all those who were inside the building at the time out on to Oxford Street. Thirty people were detained and six ultimately charged with sexual offences. There was a campaign of sending telegrams to the Premier demanding the charges be dropped. I sent a telegram on behalf of the Gay Rights Lobby. My mother also sent a telegram – we had reconciled from 1974, and my family had met and had dinner with two of my boyfriends.
96. The raid on Club 80 led to a further bonding of the community around law reform. A public meeting was held at the Sydney Gay Centre in Holt Street, which was attended by around 300 people. This time, previously unhelpful business owners attended, including those that we suspected to have previously been in league with police, and came onside in favour of reform.
97. On 5 February 1983, I was part of a rally and demonstration of about 1000 people, who marched from Green Park to Town Hall Square protesting the Club 80 raid.
98. Less than a month later, on 26 February 1983, there was a second raid on Club 80. This time, eleven people were charged. The following day, an angry meeting of 500 people decided to march upon Darlinghurst Police Station, and a petition was presented to the Police Commissioner.

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99. On 4 March 1983, the owner of Club 80 threw a “Scandalous Conduct” Party at Club 80 to raise funds for people who had been arrested and were facing charges. An auction raised \$4000. One notable person who showed up to support the gay community was Jeanette McHugh, wife of a High Court Justice and the then Labor candidate for the Federal Seat of Phillip. The Lambda Legal Defence Fund was set up at a public meeting at the Sydney Gay Centre to use the money to continue to help fight charges.
100. On 27 August 1983, there was a third raid on Club 80, followed by more public meetings and rallies by the gay community.
101. Robert French and I attended a meeting with the NSW Attorney-General, Paul Landa, to try and persuade him to drop the charges. Understandably, he could not give us any undertakings to drop the charges. He made it clear that “no billing” was not a political but a legal decision.
102. All through this period, the campaign for gay rights was extending. For example, the Gay Rights Lobby started a branch in Newcastle, led by Kerry Bashford, and a busload of us went to show them support. Channel 10 showed up to report on the opening event and discussion forum, but we had to stop them because there would have been people attending those sorts of meetings that weren’t yet “out”.
103. In September 1983, a “Gay Embassy” was set up outside Neville Wran’s house in Woollahra. Each morning, Neville was greeted by a host of satirical songs, including one that started, “Neville Wran’s a gutless wonder, falalalala-lala-la-la.” I wasn’t a member of the Gay Embassy, but my then partner was.
104. The Gay Rights Lobby and the Homosexual Law Reform Coalition kept pressure on the government with further marches on Parliament through 1983 and 1984. These kept growing in size.
105. On 11 March 1984, Neville Wran established a Community Relations Bureau in the Police Department with a Police Gay Liaison Unit. We had not expected anything like this to happen before law reform occurred. It was some progress.
106. Finally, in April 1984 Neville Wran introduced a Private Member’s Bill to decriminalise gay male sexual behaviour above the age of 18. The Gay Rights Lobby was again torn as to whether or not to support the bill, because the unequal age of consent was in our opinion a problem – but we could see little other option and compromise to get some law reform seemed necessary. Ultimately, both the Gay Rights Lobby and the Homosexual Law Reform Coalition voted to neither support nor oppose the Wran Bill. The bill passed in May 1984.
107. The passage of law reform gave me and many others more of a feeling of exhausted relief than anything. Day to day, we still had to get on with our lives in a world which held negative attitudes to gay people. It was still many years before equal age of consent changes were made, and decades before marriage equality. And anti-gay violence continued to escalate.
108. In October 1984, I was one of five people elected to the Police-Gay Liaison Group, representing the Gay Rights Lobby. I recall going to a couple of the meetings, but I felt like we were just being managed and I wasn’t up for the fight. I didn’t stay in that group long.
109. After 1984, the leaders of the Gay Rights Lobby moved on. A new body, the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, dealt with wider issues than law reform, such as violence against gay people, partnership recognition and eventually marriage equality, immigration reform, adoption rights,

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and support for rainbow families. One successful initiative was The Whistle Project, when people were encouraged to wear whistles that they could blow if they were attacked. There was also the Anti-Violence Project and Dykes on Bikes.

110. For my own part, I was physically and mentally exhausted by 1984, so after the law decriminalising homosexuality passed I stepped back from the movement for a while.

AIDS

111. I am aware that ACON has been very active bringing forward the issue on anti-gay violence resulting in the Parliamentary Inquiry and this Commission. They have done tremendous work. They have great expertise in the area of community response to HIV/AIDS and I do not wish to intrude into that area. However, I would like to make the following comments.
112. Overall, the development of a much more visible, open and somewhat accepted gay lifestyle has transformed our community over the past 50 years.
113. For example, for those of us strongly connected to a gay community or social life, particularly in the inner city, beats (with notable exceptions such as Hampstead Heath in London) no longer seem to hold an important role in gay culture.
114. However, there are areas of society where that open gay community or social life is still not available to some people. I refer to working class areas in outer suburbs and rural communities, as well as many ethnic and religious minority communities. There are still many same-sex attracted men who are unable or unwilling to identify as gay, who may engage in casual sexual activity at beats.
115. The advent of HIV/AIDS from 1982 onwards devastated our community and changed the sexual activities and behaviour of my generation and the following ones. I know that many people say that HIV/AIDS gave rise to more anti-gay violence, and that attackers used HIV/AIDS as an excuse, or even a justification, for violence. It is my view that any such suggestion should be strenuously avoided.
116. My personal opinion is that a little too much is made of that relationship. I really don't think gangs of suburban youth were very engaged or informed about HIV/AIDS, or made too many connections. From my personal experiences of being attacked, I do not recall any abuse related to HIV/AIDS.
117. I believe just the increase in visibility of gay life in the media, and increased representation in popular culture, were of more likely disturbance and confusion to young people still coming to terms with their sexuality and identity, and notions of masculinity and behaviour. This is in addition to the peer pressure felt by many to conform to family and community expectations.

Violence at beats

118. There has been violence against gay men at beats, going back (in my own personal knowledge) before the 70s.
119. When I was still living at home in Punchbowl, in about 1967, I recall that there was a big ruckus one night, screaming and yelling, at around 3:00am. The next morning, I heard my parents talking about it, and my dad said something about it having something to do with that "cat" next door. This was the neighbour I mentioned earlier in paragraph [6].

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120. Years later, I ran into this neighbour at a beat in Tempe. We recognised each other and ended up sitting around having a long chat in his car. I asked him about that night. He told me that he had been at a beat in Canterbury Park when he was attacked by a gang of young people. He had fled in his car but they followed him, all the way back to the back lane of his house in Punchbowl. The confrontation that I had heard that night was when he was trying to get into his garage.
121. There was relatively more gay visibility in the city and the Eastern Suburbs than many other places in Sydney, and so much of the documented violence and hate crimes are in those areas. But there was also a lot of undocumented violence in the suburbs and outer regions, whether causing death or serious injury. I have no doubt that much of this violence wouldn't be documented – police weren't interested, victims wouldn't report to hospitals what they were doing, and if people were killed they might not have been "out" to their families.

Cahill Park, Tempe

122. The first time I personally witnessed violence at a beat was in about 1971. I had just recently got a car for my 21st birthday and would drive all over the suburbs visiting beats. I decided to go to Cahill Park in Tempe, which was a very active beat – it was basically guaranteed sex.
123. I was driving past slowly, intending to stop there. As I was driving past, I saw a carload of youths pull up. They jumped out of the car and began chasing men at the beat. You could see other men fleeing everywhere. I saw one man run down the median strip of the Princes Highway with a bigger guy chasing him with a length of car bumper.
124. I drove to the nearest phone box and called triple-zero. I told police what was happening, but I didn't hang around to find out what happened, because I knew I was breaking the law by going to a beat, and felt that police were more likely to spend an hour interrogating me about what I was doing there and arrest me. You would just do what you could.

St Leonards Park, North Sydney

125. Sometime in around 1971 or 1972, I was driving past St Leonard's Park in North Sydney. This was a big park with lots of toilet blocks and bushes, and about five beat locations. On this night, as I was driving I could see that there was a hullabaloo going on in the park, where men were being chased everywhere by pursuers. I didn't stop because I didn't think there was anything I could do.

McDougall Street, Kirribilli

126. Another very active beat was the toilets in Milson Park on McDougall Street in Kirribilli, near the boatshed and the Ensemble Theatre. I went there one night in 1973 or 1974, at about 2:00am. I went into the toilet block, but that particular night there was nobody around.
127. When I came out of the toilet, there were two guys coming into the park. They were very intoxicated. One asked me for a light. I said, "No," but I immediately knew what was going on. I ran faster than I have ever run in my life. The same guy that asked me for a light came after me, shouting "Come here you cunt," but they were too drunk to run as fast as me.
128. As I was running my shoe fell off, but I kept running to the other side of the park. I hid for about 45 minutes until I was confident that they had left, before I went back to retrieve my shoe and walk to my car which was parked on McDougall Street.

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Alexandria Park

129. Between 1985 and 1988, I frequented the Alexandria Park beat regularly. The active part of the beat was the toilet block. I was living in Erskineville until early 1988, only a short walk from Buckland Street. At that period of my life I was doing shift work and would only start work in the afternoon, which meant that I could stay out late the night before. I would often go out to the beat after going to a local pub.
130. One night, in late 1987, I left a hotel on Botany Road and walked down to Alexandria Park and into the toilet block. Usually, you'd be able to find someone there, but on this night there was no one else around.
131. When I came out of the toilet block, there was a group of young people near the basketball court on the other side of the road. They were sitting on logs along the border of the street. They started asking me, "Are you a poofter? Are you a faggot?" I tried to walk away from them and tried not to engage, but they crossed the street and came at me.
132. There were maybe 5 or 6 boys. Most of them looked like they were around 14 or 15 years old, but there was one boy who I thought looked older, maybe 19. I thought he looked older because he was taller and more physically well-built than the rest of them. He was blonde.
133. They came after me. They were carrying lengths of white PVC pipe, which they used to start striking me, and they wrestled me to the ground. I managed to wrestle them off and make it a few extra steps, but then they got me again.
134. Luckily, four men suddenly came out of a house near the corner of Buckland Street and Phillip Street. They said that they would call the police, and the youths ran away.
135. The men took me into their house. All four men were gay – two of them lived there, and the other two had come for a dinner party. The police were called, and they came shortly after. I told them what happened, but I felt that the police were more interested in what I had been doing there than what had happened to me.
136. The police told me that they would go and look for the boys, but they did a five-minute drive around before coming back and saying, "They're gone now." I don't think they ever took a formal report from me. It didn't seem to me that they had any real intention of doing anything about my bashing.
137. On Easter Saturday in 1988, I was bashed in Alexandria Park for a second time. I had moved to Marrickville by then. The night before, Good Friday, I had been out to a "Black Party" in Petersham. This was a big party, and I was drinking a punch that had been spiked with drugs so I was pretty high. I was dressed in a black leather jacket and biker boots.
138. In the early hours of the morning on Easter Saturday, I caught a taxi to Alexandria Park and went into the toilet block. There was nobody there, so I decided to walk to another beat at Waterloo Park. I walked past the high school towards McEvoy Street, where I was planning on turning left towards Waterloo Park.
139. All of a sudden, two young boys, maybe 14 or 15 years old, started yelling at me. I was an obvious target in my leather outfit. One of them was extremely agitated and angry, while the other stood back a bit. The one who was angry started to chase me up the street that led to McEvoy Street. I couldn't run quickly in my boots, and he caught up to me by the corner of the

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street. He was completely frenzied, and seemed to me to be very emotionally disturbed. He grabbed a young sapling from a tree and started to hit me with it.

140. Luckily, a panel van pulled up next to where I was being attacked. A young couple jumped out and got me into the van. The boy was yelling at them, "He's a faggot, he raped my little sister." None of it made any sense.
141. The young couple got me in the van and wanted to take me to hospital. I was in shock. Because I was living in Marrickville, I got them to take me to a small hospital on Marrickville Road that in those days had an emergency department. I needed two stitches on my left eyebrow.
142. A few weeks later, I ran into an acquaintance who was a teacher at the school near Alexandria Park. When I told him what happened, he immediately said he knew who it must have been – he was a troubled kid from a bad family background who had been suspended from school. The teacher was aware of anti-gay violence being committed by some of the students. Unfortunately I can't now remember the name of that teacher. That would have been the last time that I saw him.
143. A couple of years later, in 1990, I saw the news about Richard Johnson being murdered in Alexandria Park, after perpetrators called Johnson's number which had been graffitied on the wall. I immediately thought that he must have been killed by the same gang that bashed me. I always wondered whether I should have gone to police about it, but they got those boys pretty quickly, so I didn't think I needed to.
144. There was a third incident that I remember from Alexandria Park, but I can't remember chronologically whether it was before or after the other two incidents I have mentioned. I was there one day, around 3 or 4pm. There were two men in the toilet having sex. I was on the lookout. A kid came towards the toilet door, and I told the two others that he was coming. One of the two men went out and headed back to his car. The next minute I heard yelling and the voices of two kids shouting. The other man who was in the toilet with me ran out and intervened. He started yelling at the boys. I went out and walked quickly in the opposite direction towards Buckland St.

Regent Street, Central

145. In about 1982, I discovered that a toilet block on Regent Street in the city, near Central, was a beat. I used it for a couple of years.
146. One night, I heard a few people approach the toilet block, shouting. I walked out very quickly and came face to face with a young man – I think I actually gave him a shock because I came out so quickly. I ran off, but saw that the young men began harassing another person in the street who was sitting in his car. They were shouting using derogatory terms against gay people.
147. I ran around the corner to Regent Street Police Station and told them what was happening. But the police showed no interest. They showed more interest in why I was there. They did nothing.

Rushcutters Bay Park

148. The Rushcutters Bay Park beat was a very popular, very active beat. It was close in proximity to Kings Cross and the Oxford Street nightlife. I started going there in the 1970s, right through to the late 80s and early 90s. There was an amenities block on the side of the park near New Beach Road. There were male and female bathrooms on either side of the building, and an entrance

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to change rooms for sporting events through the centre passage. The iron gates into that passageway were sometimes left open, and that was a meeting place.

149. But the real “spot” to engage in sex was beside the canal. If you met someone in the toilet, you would maybe acknowledge each other, and then walk over to the canal. Because topsoil had been used to build up the park over time, the ground sloped steeply downwards until it hit the fence line. The drop was about 3-4 feet. If you were on the ground right by the fence, you were obscured and below the ground level. This made it more secure to engage in sexual activity. People would have sex anywhere along the canal fence line right up to the footbridge closest to New South Head Road.
150. If it was a particularly busy night, you could cross over the footbridge to the side of the cricket oval, and find a sheltered spot amongst the huge row of Moreton Bay Figs. The only risk was that you would be exposed to view from the motel that used to back onto the oval, so you could only go there if it was very late at night.
151. Some time in the 1990s, I was using the beat at Rushcutters Bay Park, near the canal. Suddenly, a car drove into the park itself, spotting people with its bright headlights and driving at them, almost like people going kangaroo shooting. It was a busy Saturday night, and men were scattering everywhere, running like the dickens. I sprinted over the footbridge and past the oval, trying to get home to Macleay Street in Potts Point. I never saw who was in the car or what they did, because I just ran for it.
152. As far as I know, the only way that a car could have entered the park was via a padlocked gate on New Beach Road. It was usually only opened for council vehicles that were mowing the lawns. So I have always had the belief, rightly or wrongly, that it must have been a raid by police.

Centennial Park

153. I frequented the Centennial Park beat often in the 90s. At the point of the park adjoining Oxford Street there is a reservoir; below the reservoir is a road; below the road is a slope that had a lot of bushes. That was a popular place to go cruising. Another spot was the wetlands area, but that is now fenced off to protect the environment.
154. I was at Centennial Park one night in about 1997. I had been at the main cruising area on the slope, but had walked a short distance away from it. All of a sudden I heard shouting. I couldn't hear what was being said, but the voices sounded young. I immediately started to run, and when I did I fell and hit my head on a rock. I think I knocked myself out, but thankfully I came to almost immediately and got up and kept running.
155. I ran towards the gates at the top of Oxford Street. From there I could see that there were kids on BMX bikes, careering around the park and trying to harass gay people. I ran out onto Oxford Street and so I didn't witness anything else.
156. Other gay people I have spoken to who used that beat told me that that used to happen all the time.

Coogee Beat

157. The beat at Coogee used to be on the south side of the beach, on the path towards Grant Reserve. Back in the day, all along the beach front used to be a board walk. When the tide was out, you used to be able to go underneath the pylons, and that was a secluded meeting place.

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Although you'd be eaten alive by mosquitos. The beat extended all the way from the south of the beach and along what is now the coastal walkway to Grant Reserve.

158. At night, they used to leave the baths at Grant Reserve unlocked. If you would meet somebody at the beach you could sneak inside one of the old baths buildings.
159. I don't remember there being a beat on the north side of Coogee, towards Gordons Bay.

Some other beats

160. Obelisk Bay (near Mosman), Doyle Ground in North Parramatta, and Richie Benaud Oval in Parramatta were three other well-known beats.

Reflections on the legacy of the gay rights movement

161. I am a member of the First Mardi Gras Inc, and was Secretary of that body from 2020 to 2021. We're very proud of what we do and the priority that we are given in the parade.
162. What the gay rights movement achieved is outstanding. Back in the 60s and 70s, there was one "type" of gay person – they were a little bit effeminate, all about fashion, all about partying. But now, there are so many different tribes within the LGBTQI community, and everyone can find their own tribe. There are subsets of what kind of gay person you can be, you don't have to fit a stereotype.
163. For example, I'm now involved in the "bear" community – gay men who are hairy, overweight and middle-aged. I certainly don't remember gay people looking like that when I was young. There used to be no representation of different types of gay people. People did not want to come out if there was no visibility of gay people like them. Now being gay covers such a wide spectrum of different types of people, and that's wonderful.
164. But our fight isn't over. The progress is not even, or shared across the board. It's still not safe for many people to come out – for example, working-class people or people from certain ethnic communities.
165. And I always worry that it all could be taken away. I never let myself get too comfortable about our rights. Over history there have been other periods of partial or relative acceptability for gay people – for example, in the 1790s when the Prince of Wales had many gay friends; in the Oscar Wilde era about a hundred years after that; and the gay subculture in Germany in the 1920s – but none of those lasted. I'm 72 now but I still think, don't sit on your laurels, the work isn't done.

Signature:



Name:

BARRY CHARLES

Date:

14 November 2022