

**Submission
No 26**

**INQUIRY INTO GAY AND TRANSGENDER HATE CRIMES
BETWEEN 1970 AND 2010 - 57TH PARLIAMENT**

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Sue Thompson - 2nd Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry

I was employed by the NSW Police Service as the Police Gay/Lesbian Client Consultant 1990-2002 (until medical retirement). This is my second Submission to the Inquiry.

Sharing a story about “The Hurstville Boys” and Hate Crimes in the 1970s

I grew up around the Hurstville area and went to High School at St George Girls' High at Kogarah 1969-1974. So, many of our friends were from the Hurstville and surrounding area. As teenagers we frequented many places in a wide area as did teenage and young adult boys. As teenagers, adventure was high on the list of priorities for some of us.

We knew some of “The Hurstville Boys” as they were called in the early 70s. Same train line (Kogarah and Hurstville), many young people ‘hung out’ around the train stations in that area in the 70s – de rigueur (parents did not know). We were naïve but adventurous and did not realise how bad some boys could be.

In our wild rebellious ways as teenagers we knew some rough boys from the area. Some girls ‘hung out with’ the seriously bad Hurstville Boys as opposed to the moderately bad Hurstville Boys. I well remember stories they told – terrible stories of the kind that the book and TV series, Puberty Blues, accurately portrayed. Also, stories and realities much worse than those portrayed. It was around the same era. Beachside areas have historically been areas of much machismo, macho posturing and therefore much mistreatment of women and much homophobia. In my job that was obviously true for both The Shire (South) and the Northern Beaches (North). The Shire and the Hurstville area were just separated by Tom Ugly’s Bridge and the macho homophobic culture was the norm.

Various of those boys/young men had criminal records (some for “carnal knowledge” and who knows what else – they did not really tell much).

We did not even know that much until one day on a weekend in 1971 when we were all visiting someone’s place at Hurstville and the cops arrived (fortunately I had just left to buy cigarettes and saw the police cars on my return and kept a distance) and raided the house because the boys weren’t allowed to be around underage girls.... We had no idea until this point that they had criminal records. It was a huge drama. All the girls were taken to the police station and charged with being “uncontrollable” and “in moral danger”...not sure what happened to the boys – maybe parole breached, not sure.

This was a major drama at the school – it was a selective high school and not what St George girls did. Police at the school on the Monday etc etc. Major drama with parents. Scandalous. Various girls were taken out of school, some were put in reformatory schools/institutions.... Some were suspended.

Anyway those “Hurstville Boys” and “Hurstville Juniors” (who lived Hurstville, Allawah, Carlton, Kogarah etc) used to talk about going gay bashing. It was not called that then but gay men were called “cats” in the 70s in the Hurstville area. In 1971, I once overheard them talking about something in whispered tones. Mostly if girls asked questions about boys’ secrets, no-one answered them but I have a way of being persistent and wanting to know the truth.

I kept asking and asking and asking trying to work out what they were saying.

Their secret turned out like this after much questioning:

- The Hurstville Boys would go to various parks (they did not say where exactly but cagily mentioned 'in the city' when I persisted).
- Sometimes they would just go bashing
- Sometimes they would send in the least macho boy to chat to the "cats" and make out like he wanted to "crack onto them".
- The others would be hidden in bushes and waiting nearby
- When the moment was right they would all run in and kick and bash the gay man/men.
- I asked if they hurt them and they said "nah, nah, nah, just scared 'em" – that would have been highly unlikely and I suspect the truth was much worse... I hate to think
- Sometimes they would think it was even funnier to not rescue the decoy and wait until he'd had to....I did not ask what.....then they would come in to bash even harder.
- Also then the decoy would be so enraged that they laughed about how his violence would then be much worse which may well have been one of the reasons for them not 'rescuing' him from their ambush.

I actually did not believe them at the time as it sounded like the most far-fetched, ridiculous and horrible thing. I could not imagine it was true back then. I have always hated violence and bullying and was always a protector of people if they were being picked on (even at school). It made no sense to me at all. I assumed they had made it up. It really was not until I started in NSW Police in Jan 1990 that it dawned on me that they really had gone gay bashing.

I am sure that in that era of the 1970s and in that area around Hurstville and The Shire etc, that it would be extremely unlikely, almost impossible, that any gay men or lesbians would have ever contemplated reporting violence to Police. This is similar to the non reporting of rape. I knew many girls who were raped or pack raped by young men. None reported or even considered it.

Homosexuality was a criminal offence for gay men. For lesbians the prejudice and discrimination was just as powerful despite there not being an actual crime on the books. It would have been absolutely rare for reporting to police and I find it hard to even imagine in what circumstances those crimes would have ever come to the attention of police unless a murder took place.

To report violence to Police would have meant someone was much more likely to be arrested than assisted. Having just re-watched the powerful documentary, "Deep Water the Real Story", on SBS TV the other night. I was again horrified to hear David McMahon's story of his bashing and lucky escape from likely murder over the Bondi cliffs in the late 1980s and of how the Police responded when he went to them to report. They actually put him in a police cell – such a terrible act of intimidation, disregard and revictimisation of a victim. I highly respect his courage in telling his story publicly and especially given he had identified the bashers who were not charged.

Bashers might have been victims of paedophiles in surrounding areas and their misconception that 'gay equals paedophile' enables their targeted violence

This week after some careful consideration, I put a post on my High School year's Facebook group to ask if anyone had any other information about the Hurstville Boys and Hurstville Juniors and bashing of gay men or LGBTI people in that era, remembering that some of my sister students married childhood sweethearts from that area. There have been a few online exchanges with school friends including one who came from a good family and was the victim of a paedophile Church Minister when she was very young. We realised that one of the covert paedophile rings in the local area around Bexley, Arncliffe, Bardwell Park often targeted young people from institutions they worked in or

visited such as boys homes for boys who had fallen on hard times. The abuse at the Salvation Army Boys Home at Bexley North was investigated by the Royal Commission and referred to as “abuse at the severe end of sexual abuse considered by the Royal Commission”.

It would be very likely that in any areas, that were feeder areas for children’s institutions or homes where there was sexual abuse, that victims of that abuse might later act out their trauma by wrongly targeting gay men with severe brutality due to their incorrect assumption that their male abusers were gay when in fact they were paedophiles.

- *“Dad was a cop at Hurstville and Kogarah in the 70s and 80’s. He did talk about “poofster bashings”, from memory. Shame he isn’t here now to help with these inquiries. He had a great memory and would have remembered so much!” [from one school friend].*
- *“It is quite possible that some of those basher boys had also been victims of paedophiles & wrongly assumed that gay = paedophile & hence the bashing (along with totally distorted proving of macho of course). At the various schools that I had to run interventions in (one in 1990 where some of the kids were on parole for murdering a gay man) one of the first things always to deal with was unravelling the lie that gay men are paedophiles. Some had definitely been sexually abused by family members and in their minds they assumed that meant their 'uncle' or whomever was gay. So wrong”. [Comment by me]*

I refer the committee to my first Submission of 7th November 2018

I take this opportunity to formally re-submit my first Submission of 2018 to this 2019 Committee and reiterate the content of that Submission and the 304 pages of Attachments 1 -17. It is important that the new Committee please consider that Submission and the many important issues covered.

If the NSW Police miss the opportunity of making amends for the past by trying to minimise the horror of the past on these issues they will do a serious disservice to their reputation, their honour and to the community they are meant to be still building bridges with. The truth sets us free to make peace and build strong futures together. Defensiveness causes damage and mistrust and stunts positive growth.

Over the last 12 months I have had my old media files and TV recordings digitised which has given me great insight into the work we did back in the 1990s to help address and overcome the failings of the 70s and 80s. These were gathered during my job 1990-2012 and include my almost 2,000 pages of media interviews, interviews with senior police, Police Ministers, myself etc and many hours of similar TV programs, news interviews etc.

I am reminded by those excellent historical records, and can see and hear, an obvious openness and easy willingness in some highly respected senior police to openly admit the mistakes of the past, to seriously address the gay hate related murders etc without fear of admitting the truth. I feel sad to see that nowadays there appears to instead be a desire to seemingly lessen and minimise the violence and murders and to be defensive about the extent and reality of that epidemic of violence. This does everyone a disservice, the LGBTI community, the police who genuinely care and the Police as an organisation who should be community leaders and role models.

Police as Community Leaders and Role Models

When I watched the QPOL Commissioner address the media the other day about some unfortunate comments made by an otherwise apparently excellent officer regarding the murder of Hannah Clarke and her three children I was heartened and reminded of how powerful and important it is for government organisations, especially community role models like the Police, to quickly, openly and easily admit mistakes and be seen to make amends without a fuss or needing to be dragged kicking and screaming to the apology table. That is leadership and honour in my mind. It is powerful and it allows the world to heal and move on rather than be stuck on conflict.

Anti Lesbian Violence

For the record I would also like to emphasise that on the issue of anti-lesbian violence, this is often underestimated and becomes invisible. The gay hate related murders almost exclusively happened to gay men or transgender people but there were cases where lesbians were murdered, but these were often more easily classed as domestic violence related or where the motive was harder to determine.

The other night I attended an excellent play *Our Blood Runs in the Street* about this violence in this era. The panel discussion afterwards reminded me to remind this Committee that lesbian violence was also at epidemic levels in the 70s, 80s and 90s. Lesbians, according to our NSW Police and Price Waterhouse "Out of the Blue" Survey in 1994 were up to 6 times more likely to be victims of violence in a 12mth period than other women and gay men up to 4 times more likely to be victims of violence in a 12 month period than other men.

Lesbians were extremely unlikely to report to police, even with all of our strategies of the 1990s. Women are used to living with fear and violence in their lives. They have historically tended towards silence about violence and abuse, to soldier on, internalise it, be resilient, move on, not make a fuss, consider it "their lot in life". It is a complex issue. Even high profile lesbians who were bashed during my job would not report. In my perception their distrust of police, seen as a patriarchal organisation, was much higher than even gay men's mistrust of Police. As women they were used to not trusting men with their suffering and vulnerability. Also, as women they were used to putting their needs last and to not making a fuss about their own needs. I would like to kindly remind the Committee not to underestimate the hate related violence also directed to lesbians during the era of the Inquiry.

In conclusion

Thank you to the Chairman and Committee Members for your consideration of my earlier submission and its 17 attachments and of this my second submission.

I also sincerely hope that:

1. some of the Members of the Committee might be able to make the effort, in their very busy schedules, to attend the play "Our Blood Runs in the Street" which covers these issues and this era
2. and to also watch the excellent SBS documentary by Blackfella Films "Deep Water, the Real Story" which extensively covers the time period and the issues that the Inquiry is considering. <https://www.sbs.com.au/programs/deep-water/the-real-story>

Submitted by Sue Thompson, 27th February 2020 (v 2 with typos corrected)