



It's gay-bashing season, when cowardly gangs — often made up of privileged schoolboys barely in their teens — assault and murder in the streets. MARTYN GODDARD reports.

EXTREME PREJUDICE

THERE WERE four of them: about 17, all tall, male, one blond. The blond one cupped his hand to his mouth and shouted, "F. Kin' poofers!" They were standing in Taylor Square, the hub of Sydney's gay district, and the annual Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade had just gone by. A mainly gay crowd of 100,000 jammed the roadway, but there was a gap around the four young men.

"He's a blondy faggot!" Their voices were becoming hoarse now. They had been shouting their hatred for hours. Few shouted back. The four young men felt no threat of violence from the thousands they were abusing. They were safe, and knew it.

Eight months later, on a warm Sunday night in spring, Jim Timmins and Craig Brown waited in Taylor

Square for a bus. Even half an hour past midnight, the place was still buzzing.

Taylor Square is not a square but a huge, ill-shaped circle with seven major roads feeding cars, buses and trucks everlastingly through it. Within five minutes' walk are all the main dance bars, pubs and coffee shops of Sydney's gay community.

Gay men from cities and towns and farms all over the country moved here in their thousands. Here was their golden land, where they could live their lives as they chose, free and clear of the hatreds which had always followed them.

Many of them knew Timmins and Brown, and waved as the two men walked towards the bus stop in Taylor Square. Until recently, they were president and secretary of the Bobby



Sydney's Taylor Square: a mecca for gay men — and their bashers. Above left, Jim Timmins: attacked at a bus stop. Above right, Wayne Jarvis: scared and angry.

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EXTREME PREJUDICE

Goldsmith Foundation, the main financial support organisation for people with AIDS.

At the bus stop, Timmins saw a young man and his girlfriend, and another young man a metre away. "Got a cigarette?" the first man asked Brown.

"No, sorry, I don't smoke."

"What's that, then?" The man rapped his finger on Brown's shirt pocket.

Deep in the pit of Timmins' stomach, a muscle tightened. He knew what was going to happen, and grabbed Brown's arm. "Come on, let's go!"

He did not move quickly enough. The young thug delivered a swift, practised kick to Timmins' groin. Timmins fell in sudden pain on to the roadway. The two men and another two or three, previously unseen, now turned their attack on Brown. His glasses were broken and shards of glass driven into his face. He was bleeding freely, the right side of his body covered in blood.

Timmins stood up but was again felled with a hard kick to the groin. The pain was so enveloping that he became semi-conscious. He would later spend four days in hospital with broken fingers, cuts and deep bruising. Semi-conscious and in shock, he saw the assailant and girl ambling away in the direction of Kings Cross. Timmins followed. He stopped a taxi to ask for help but the man drove off. He hailed a second cab, and jumped into the passenger seat. "I've been bashed," he told the driver. "They're over there. Call the police." The driver told him to get out of the taxi. Timmins ignored him. "I've been bashed. Call the police, please." Instead, the driver hit his emergency button to summon help — for himself — and left the taxi, taking his keys with him. Almost immediately, half a dozen other cabs drew up and surrounded them. Timmins kept shouting "Call the police!" but the drivers stared at him and did nothing.

So he followed his bashers. They were still walking casually towards Kings Cross, past St Vincent's Hospital. Timmins walked into the casualty department and asked the desk clerk to call the police. She refused.

"Do you want a doctor?"

"No, I want the police. I've been bashed, and they're just outside."

"Do you want a doctor?"

"I want the police!"

"If you want to call the police, there's a public phone over there."

As he stood at the telephone, a burly hospital security guard appeared next to him. Timmins got the message and left. Outside, his assailant and the girl were still in sight. Soon they were in the middle of Kings Cross and Timmins went into the police station nearby. Two young policemen were on duty. "I've been bashed," he said. "The people who did it are in the fruit shop down the road."

"Have you been at the Albury [a gay pub in Paddington]?" one of the policemen said, his feet still on the desk. "They'll be gone by the time we get there. You: go and sit over there."

The police offered him no assistance and no word of concern. A foot patrol finally went to the fruit shop but the bashers had gone. Timmins found his own way home and saw his own doctor the next day. Four days later, he was released from Sydney Hospital, his broken hand in plaster.

THE BASHERS do not always get things their own way. Bruce Shepherd is a big man. He has been a bodyguard, and was once station sergeant at Sydney's Darlinghurst and Kings Cross police stations. After leaving the force, he decided to acknowledge his homosexuality.

One evening last August, walking past the Midnight Shift, a gay dance bar in Darlinghurst, he was confronted by four slightly built teenagers. They wore new tracksuits and expensive running shoes. "Do you know where there's any poofers?" they asked. "We're looking to kill one."

For a moment, he thought they were joking. "Look no further," he answered. They tried to bash him — two from the front, two from behind — but they quickly hit the ground. More than a dozen gay men heard the disturbance and laid into the youths. Shepherd, the intended victim, had to intervene to prevent serious injury.

He believed the drubbing they had just received did not reflect well on the gay community. A little later, he talked to the bruised youths, one of whom had been stabbed in the leg during another fight earlier in the night.

"We haven't got any money to get home," the boys complained. The gay ex-cop gave them \$20 and hailed a cab. He told the driver to take the injured boy to Sydney Hospital and the others to their homes in Greenwich, on Sydney's affluent lower North Shore.

WILL'S BEST friend, Robert, was standing in the aisle when the effeminate man carrying a clutch-bag boarded the train. Obviously homosexual, the boys thought, as the man sat four seats away from the group of 16-year-olds. "Poof," Robert snarled at the man, and hit him lightly on the chest and shoulder. The man stood up to move away; the boy hit again, harder.

In fear and temper, the man hit out twice. Robert fell back in shock; Will, a powerfully built youth, was furious. He idolised Robert. They were the closest of friends, spending almost all their leisure hours together.

All five boys attacked, but Will was by far the most aggressive. When the man fell to the carriage floor, Will kicked him

hard in the body and face. He kept on kicking until the man was wet with his own blood, his nose broken and teeth hanging on bloody threads from his mouth. Will felt deep, almost sexual satisfaction. Doing this in front of his friends — particularly in front of Robert — was a new and marvellous experience.

The boys arrived at their stop. They got off the train, each spitting on the man, and sauntered home. They felt proud that they had upheld morality by thrashing a pervert. They knew the police would not be called.

Will, a seasoned gay-basher at 16, is now in his early 30s. In London, 10 years after the beginning of his career as a gay-basher, he came to terms with his own homosexuality. It was a painful process, but now he can see the motivations of his teenage violence more clearly, including the strong — but long-denied — feeling for his best friend, Robert. "I'd always had a crush on this guy," he told *Good Weekend*. "Now I know I was madly in

More than half of those b

love with the guy. I even went out with his ex-girlfriend because it was something attached to him."

"I used to get satisfaction out of the violence, with my friends being there — especially Robert. It's very sexual. It was a big turn-on for me. It used to enter into my mind (while masturbating). I used to feel very proud of myself afterwards, especially if he was watching."

Most of the young thugs who take the lead in gay-bashing gangs do so, he believes, because of doubts about their own sexual identity — and because they believe they are performing a service for society. When they grow up, when sex holds less threat, they stop bashing.

MOST GAY men who have lived in Surry Hills or Darlinghurst for more than a year have been bashed at least once. But nobody knows the dimensions of the violence. Reports are not centrally compiled. Police are not allowed to ask: "Are you gay?"

The murder rate is more revealing. The deaths of men who are killed specifically for being gay amount to between 5 and 10 per cent of all NSW murders. In the 10 months to October, at least six murders were identified as gay-related.

In Melbourne, gay leaders believe the murder rate is running at around two-thirds that of Sydney, with a killing, on average, every two or three months. And they say bashings are also less frequent — though frequent enough for the gay community to experience a sense of constant threat.

"Melbourne gay community life does

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not have the geographical focus of Sydney's," said Adam Carr, a gay journalist and a member of Victoria's new Police-Gay Liaison Committee. "So you don't get bashed as often walking down the street in Melbourne."

Most at risk are men — sometimes married, frequently "in the closet" — who go to parks and toilet blocks for sex with other men. And such men are least likely to seek police assistance. "One man who was bashed in Footscray Park dragged himself home where he bled to death," Carr said. "He wouldn't even call an ambulance."

It is a myth in the Sydney gay community that the bashers are mainly "westies", youths from the western suburbs who come into the city for a night's bashing and robbery. According to a survey of Sydney gay-bashings, the Streetwatch Report, assailants are in-

Sue Thompson (centre) with staff of the mobile station based at Surry Hills.



bashed said there were witnesses who generally did nothing.

variably male and aged between 10 and 25. Most are schoolboys. Police believe students from one inner-Sydney high school may be associated with scores of bashings over at least two years — including, they suspect, as many as three murders. With the co-operation of teachers, community members and youth workers, police organised a three-day intervention to challenge that school's culture of violence. Former lawyer Sue Thompson, employed by the NSW police to advise on gay and lesbian issues, was closely involved.

"Many kids think that by bashing gays they are moral ambassadors," she said. "It is very important for police to be seen to say violence against *anyone* is not okay."

At the high school, some students were torn between loyalty to friends who had been involved in gay-bashing and a growing rejection of habitual violence. One Muslim boy was in conflict between the message of tolerance from police and social workers, and what he saw as the teachings of his religion.

The schoolboys do not display physical courage, hunting in packs of up to 15 — the younger the bashers, the larger the gang. And they choose victims who are alone or, at most, in pairs. And the lack of interest shown by passers-by is alarming. In the survey, more than half of those bashed said there were witnesses, but they generally did nothing.

One group, believed to be responsible last summer for a spate of bashings with baseball bats, is from the silvertail eastern suburb of Double Bay. It was probably responsible for the brutal bashing of Trevor Braybrook and Wayne Jarvis in

Surry Hills four days before Christmas 1989. The two men were walking back to their home just after midnight. Suddenly they were hit from behind, too quickly and too hard to see their attackers. Jarvis rolled, unconscious, into the gutter. Braybrook, half-stunned but still on his feet, tried to fight them off. He was kicked and punched. When the attackers fled, Braybrook knocked at a door. But instead of allowing him to call the police and an ambulance, the neighbours switched off their lights.

HISTORICALLY, relations between police and Australia's gay communities have been strained. According to one statistic thrown up by the Streetwatch Report, fewer than half of the gays reporting their bashings to gay organisations had been prepared to tell police as well. This was because they believed there was little the police either could, or would, do. Low expectations of police co-operation and effectiveness has sometimes led to the formation of vigilante groups. In Melbourne, a group calling itself the Friends of Dorothy (after an Edwardian euphemism for homosexuals) has been operating for more than a year.

With new policies and the appointment of Police-Gay Liaison Officers in NSW and Victoria, trust and co-operation was improving dramatically until a series of confrontations between gays and police — most recently at a Fred Nile rally at Kings Cross last September — caused new tensions.

Some gay leaders believe the short-lived era of co-operation is now dead.

That, NSW police adviser Sue Thompson believes, would delight the thugs. "It would be a tragedy if that were to happen," she says.

Recently, Thompson persuaded senior police to place a mobile station at Taylor Square on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights for the three months of summer. The station, a bus with communications equipment, is staffed by up to six officers. Several foot patrols and a patrol car also use it as a base.

Surry Hills patrol commander Chief Inspector Kerry Beggs believes the initiative is working, and he wants it to continue.

"This is not an exercise in public relations," he says. "We're law enforcers, and we're going to do our best during the 'silly season' to maintain our presence and stop people being assaulted."

THE DELAYED emotional effects of violence are well documented. They can include flashbacks, disturbed sleep, nightmares, great anger, and a profound feeling of being vulnerable and unsafe.

After three bashings, Wayne Jarvis, a gentle, quietly spoken man, is scared and angry. "I wanted to get a gun and go and shoot as many people as possible," he said, "to do a Hoddle Street."

Recently, while he and Braybrook were driving near their home, teenage boys called out "Poofsters!" from the footpath. Though there was no real physical threat, the memory of their previous assaults came rushing back. "If I could have shot them," Jarvis said, "I'd have had a good laugh." □

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