

**Submission
No 1**

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

Name: Ms Sallie Colechin

Date Received: 21 December 2019

On the 24th of June 1978 many lesbians and gay men gathered outside the court in Darlinghurst to walk down Oxford St. We had a legal permit to march to Hyde Park, and then make some announcements before disassembling for the evening there. I was part of the Gay Solidarity group who organised the day's activities in remembrance of the Stonewall Riots in NYC on June 24th, 1969. We had marched through Sydney that morning from the Town Hall to Martin Place. In the afternoon we had a forum at the Paddington Town Hall to explore the legal difficulties of being an out gay person at work. The State's Attorney General was present, with other luminaries of the legal profession. That evening as we assembled near the Courthouse in Darlinghurst we had planned a celebratory march/dance down Oxford street, which we were calling our Mardi Gras. Our aim was to celebrate our sexuality (still illegal for gay men), and to encourage people to come out - 'Out of the Bars and onto the Streets'. The NSW police, under the guidance of the Police Minister (and Premier at the time, Neville Wran) were uncomfortable with our gathering from the beginning. They had not expected as many people. We had one truck, with a sound system that played two songs. I was on the back of this truck. A lot of people joined us as we headed down Oxford Street just after 10 p.m. We hadn't gone more than a block or so when the police present started to try and hurry us up-sweep us down the street. Things started to feel very uncomfortable by the time we reached Hyde Park when the police decided we could not stop the truck and make any announcements and they attempted to arrest Lance Gowland who had been driving the truck. A couple of people in the crowd called out 'to the cross', and a lot of people in the crowd (by then over 500) headed down College St to William St. We could hear the police on their walkie talkies stating 'close off the road at the fountain and have back up ready for when they enter the cross'. We realised that the NSW police were prepared for a fight and would ambush the crowd. There were no mobile phones then so we hurried as fast as we could through the back streets of Darlinghurst to the El Alamein fountain. We saw the police close Darlinghurst road at William St, blocking it with paddy wagons. By the time we got near the fountain it was mayhem. The police had given the crowd no more than 20 seconds to disperse before ploughing in with many paddy wagons and police to arrest people. A riot had broken out between the police, the crowd and many people who worked in the cross. None of the police had their badges on and they were very violent and aggressive with anyone seen to be a lesbian or a homosexual. I was held in a doorway by my then girlfriend otherwise I too would have been viciously grabbed and thrown into a paddy wagon. It was and remains a very frightening experience to me. I had never before, nor since experienced such blatant and aggressive homophobic violence. And this by the very people who were supposed to protect us! I can still hear the loud screams of people being pulled, hit and thrown against and into paddy wagons. The NSW Police have since apologised for their actions, however this apology did not come from the Police Commissioner at the time, but from his deputy. This experience will stay with me forever.

Sallie Colechin