

**Submission  
No 15**

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

**Organisation:** Pride History Group

**Date Received:** 28 February 2020

---



Pride History Group, Inc.

PO Box 242, GLEBE, 2037

ABN 38 139 191 788

Dr Shirleene Robinson  
President, Pride History Group  
Email:

Friday, 28 February 2020

### **Submission to the Inquiry into Gay and Transgender hate crimes between 1970 and 2010**

The Pride History Group makes this submission to the NSW Legislative Council's *Standing Committee on Social Issues* regarding Gay and Transgender hate crimes between 1970 and 2010.

#### **About the Pride History Group**

We are a non-profit community-based organisation, focused on recording and making accessible Sydney's LGBTIQ+ history. We believe that an awareness and appreciation of the history and contribution of LGBTIQ+ people, including the movement for rights and recognition, will enhance the wellbeing of this community.

Our organisation relies on the contribution of volunteers and donors and we receive support from the City of Sydney which allows us to undertake our work. Our membership includes advocates who have made substantial contributions towards the removal of legal and social discrimination against the LGBTIQ+ community.

#### **Statement with regard to the Terms of Reference**

Our work within Sydney's LGBTIQ+ community, has elucidated significant barriers within the criminal justice system and broader society stemming from homophobia and transphobia. Discrimination and violence, including by perpetrators within the police force, meant that many historical hate crimes against LGBTIQ+ went unreported due to fear of reprisals as well as a lack of trust in the system and belief that justice would not be served. Some of these impediments are outlined in the following excerpts from oral history recordings.



Pride History Group, Inc.

PO Box 242, GLEBE, 2037

ABN 38 139 191 788

## **Oral Histories recounting historical attitudes and hate crimes on the basis of sexuality and gender identity**

Pride History Group holds a collection of over 150 oral history recordings with LGBTIQ+ people who share their experiences of life in Sydney. The age of interviewees varies, with the majority born between the 1920s and 1960s. This means that they came of age in the 1940s through to the 1970s and 80s. As part of our submission, we have extracted selected open access examples of 'gay bashings' as described in their interviewees. We hold additional oral histories in our collection which have access restrictions and hence have not been included in the excerpts below.

By sharing a selection of personal stories, we hope to provide a direct testament to the real threats and consequences for LGBTIQ+ people living in Sydney, particularly in the 1970s and 80s and through to 2010.

David Abello, born in 1956, speaks about his experiences in the 1970s as a young gay man in Sydney. He states:

*"I got really badly bashed ...in that park...Victoria Park, near the swimming pool. By about 6 or 7 ...bit hard to tell. I was walking and went across the grass...they basically ambushed me... I had beautiful long hair, I looked like a hippie but they didn't call me hippie they called me poofter...That was my first serious beating of many."*

In 2016, Alex Garfield shared his reflections of life in Sydney in the 70s and 80s:

*"You couldn't afford to come out like today. I mean the 70s, the 80s - very tough for gay people...The police in the early days were quiet vicious. Of course if you did the beats and you got bashed up. The police didn't give a ---- ... your just a gay person."*

Alex continues:

*"No. It never happened to me... Three people I did know - I can't mention their names... But I do know three people who were severely bashed. These were gay bashings for sure... As far as I know there was one [bashings at beats] in North Sydney, one in Ashfield Park, and near Central...There was the chap who I do know his partner ....he was from New Zealand and he was beheaded...in the Frenches Forrest area."*



Pride History Group, Inc.

PO Box 242, GLEBE, 2037

ABN 38 139 191 788

Ron Smith recounts the misogyny of the time (the eighties), even within the gay community:

*"The (Mardi Gras) Committee was stacked with misogynist men... I see misogyny as broader than women hating...it's almost like queer bashing... I remember...Dennis Lennox who was a solidier ....he'd left the Committee and moved up to Brisbane and he got bashed almost to death on a beat. And I was there when the news hit the Committee and they laughed about it. They actually said 'That stupid Queen...'"*

Judy Burnett moved to Sydney in 1961. She explains her memories of violence at Karen's Castle on Cleveland Street - although the exact circumstances are not known. She states:

*"I vaguely remember I was on stage one night and someone came in with a tyre lever and started bashing somebody in the audience. Everyone ran, there was queens running in all directions....And I think they closed it after that....You just grab your costumes and run..."*

Comparing experiences in Sydney in 2006 (the year of the interview) to the violence of the 60s and 70s, Judy describes:

*"There wasn't [gay bashings] to the extent there is now... Unfortunately today's bashings seem to be based on religion. There is more religious bashings - people bash you if they think it is against god."*

In 2016, Sharyn Lee described her memories of the Club scene in the Dawn O'Donnell era:

*"We did have a lot of (girls) clubs... We did have a lot of problems. We did have a lot of puffer bashings - as they called it. And there was a lot of killings..."*

Sharyn's interviewer asks: And what about women - were they targeted? Sharyn continues:

*"No. Only by straight men... They'd want to rape you so they could say they got a lesbian."*

Lance Gowland was interviewed in 2005 about his life of activism and talks about his involvement with *Street Patrol* which was modelled off the community-driven patrols being conducted in San Francisco.

*"...Gay Street Patrols to protect people from being bashed. This was probably in the eighties. There were bashings and there were murders around Oxford Street. There was one guy and he was only a teenager and he was with some of his other young*



Pride History Group, Inc.

PO Box 242, GLEBE, 2037

ABN 38 139 191 788

*friends and they were attacked. His friends run off. And when they came back he was dead - he'd been bashed to death. And that was happening all the time. There was a lot of murders... I think it was a lot to do with AIDS. When the AIDS thing blew up then it was seen as though we were killing children ... there was this fear - it was a really bad time... The amount of gay bashings increased tremendously.."*

As both an LGBTIQ+ organisation and a group of individuals we are keenly aware of the multifarious historical forms of hate crimes and discrimination, including verbal abuse and harassment and physical violence including murder, that have marred the lives of too many LGBTIQ+ individuals. We hope that these first-hand accounts assist the Standing Committee in addressing historical hate crimes in NSW. We also encourage any further support to improve LGBTIQ+ community wellbeing, as well as efforts to reduce homophobia and transphobia in contemporary society and eliminate barriers for those seeking justice today.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Shirleene Robinson  
President, Pride History Group