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Historical perspective of insanity

At the time in the 80's, the general media would glorify women as objects of desire, including full page color spreads of bikini girls in major papers. 'Meter Maids' wearing only bikinis would be hired to walk the streets and put coins in peoples parking meters to avoid tickets. Pubs had separate rooms and entrances for women. Society was seemingly, weirdly, segregated — the "blokes" who did the hard yakka (work) and their "sheilas" who would service their blokes. It was all a little like parts of the middle east today.



Australian culture evolved quickly out of this, but Queensland (& Tasmania) were behind the rest of the country.

Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen's Queensland of the '80's represents the most terrifying era in the Australian history of gay people.

Queensland derived its criminal law from the UK including the prohibition of "buggery" and "gross indecency" between males. While other states in Australia fixed their anti-gay laws in the 1970's/1980's, Queensland was ruled by the conservative 'National Party' led by Bjelke-Petersen. His government actively used homophobia for electoral advantage, linking all gay men to pedophilia & asserting all gay men are morally deviant.

Anti-gay laws were intensely enforced by Queensland police throughout the 1980s, (lesbian activity was always legal). At this time, government policy was very hostile – at the height of *The Beat*'s success, in 1985, the government passed an amendment to the Liquor Act making it an offense to serve alcohol or to allow to remain on licensed premises any "deviants, sexual perverts or child molesters" (with interpretation of this definition to be up to the individual police officer).

Indeed, some police would come to *The Beat* for "poofa hunts" ['poofa' being Aussie derogatory slang for gay] and turned a blind eye to "poofa bashings" – a common problem in Brisbane at the time – particularly in our back alley and car park. Some police detectives, out of uniform, would return to *The Beat* later in the night to drink, snort cocaine, drop acid, pick up a 'cuddle bunny' for the night and have fun. It was a weird experience.

The Bjelke-Petersen Government intended that the new licensing law be used to refuse service to gay men — and centered it on the 2 major gay venues in Brisbane — the *Terminus* and *The Beat*.

Police raids intensified. Our payoffs with cash envelopes, cases of liquor and slabs of beer to local police, including the vice squad, softened the blow, but occasionally we had to be 'seen to lose' — so we would negotiate a Monday or Tuesday evening for a future raid, and ensure the club was had a smattering of lesbians and straight looking people that night. Often, I would receive a heads up advance warning phone call on our "red phone" an old semi-functional pay phone that was setup under the stairs in a cubicle adjacent to the main bar.



It became a game of "us" vs "them" — the "them" being the police, the politicians, the poofa bashers and often, our own families.

When police raids were impending, we would either get a heads up warning, or our doorman would see a bevy of unmarked police cars pulling up on the main street, often with a paddy wagon in convoy (a utility vehicle with a human cage in the back to contain people getting a free ride to the local jail), our doorman would flash the overhead lights from switches installed at the door, signaling to all customers that a raid was about to occur.

This stupid game however, helped solidify a gay Brisbane community united in just wanting acceptance. The more the government and police pushed us, the more brazen we would become.

The Queensland National Party alerted voters to a looming homosexual invasion. As the dying government flailed in search of a lifeline, they latched onto homosexuality as a lifebuoy. Queensland National Party politicians such as Geoff Muntz and Ian Sinclair made their anti-gay views very vocal, with Sinclair claiming that the Labor Party's failure to condemn homosexuality was helping to spread HIV. Then Welfare Services Minister Geoff Muntz said, "*homosexuals indulge in a deviant lifestyle*" and did not think gay people should be allowed in public swimming pools. "*You'll never hear of a gay mardi gras or gay swimming carnival in Queensland.*" Muntz said at the time.

Fear of HIV and AIDS were at their height in the 1980s, the Bjelke-Petersen Government used this fear to increase homophobic sentiment and demonize gay people further. Rumors spread you could catch the homosexual only HIV/AIDS by drinking from same glassware or even being near a poofa.

It was a rather ridiculous to-and-fro war played out on the streets of the Fortitude Valley, with larger and larger payoffs to corrupt greedier and greedier police officials and politicians.

This all resulted in unveiling a long trail of police corruption, which assisted toppling the Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen government, and which started a chain of events that changed Queensland's political landscape and brought in a new era of change to eradicate anti-gay laws and forced





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Queensland to step in line with rest of country.

In the early 80's, other gay bars included the *Terminus* (249 Brunswick St), *Alliance Hotel/Ambush Bar* (320 Boundary St), *Hacienda Hotel/Zuloos Bar* (Brunswick & McLaughlin St) and *The Sportsman Hotel* (130 Leichhardt St). Each of these bars had a typically loyal and regular customer set, and generally would keep a low profile to fly under the radar.

A Twisted Theatrical Twist

Having learned the set design and construction concepts from my days at the *Queensland Theatre Company*, the club decor and themes would change on whim, from dungeons & dragons to a cruise ship, to a speak-easy (using some left behind real gambling tables), to a junk yard, to baseball stadium, to moulin rouge, to hell. It was extremely theatrical utilizing a lot of trompe-l'oeil design. Impossible to do these days due to fire regulations.

My investors Vic & Gerry (fair and encouraging, yet very hands-off bosses) years later would be under investigation for also running illegal gambling clubs and massage parlors.

This made regular customers even more regular.

We opened with a theme of gambling club, that was designed as tongue in cheek to the local vice squad of police, raiding Vic and Gerry's gambling clubs on a more regular basis. We borrowed real gambling tables from 2 of their clubs that were temporality closed by the vice squad, added a bunch of fake Tiffany overhanging lamps and bought an old restaurant supply of coffee cups to serve drinks in. The wall's scenic fireproofed canvas drops were painted to look like the interior of a casino. This was one of my favorite themes, particularly when even the vice squad visited, and all had a good laugh.

Early on, thanks to Jerry Harrington's idea, one night as tables, we had glass topped coffins with dummy bodies inside, their hearts beating, along with skeletons in shackles hanging from the walls, where scenic flats or canvas drops covered the wall spaces with an old stone look. Fake cobwebs would be strung strategically, and the lighting design would rely heavily on red. Green lights around the bar made all the tonic water glow, and we played a background sound effects reel of occasional screams, creaks and chain noise that would randomly be heard mixed under the DJ's '80's club music.

Another night it may a cruise ship (**R.M.S. BE▲T**) with everything in white, portholes on the wall flats and canvas drops with iconic views of things around the world, all the staff dressed in ships uniforms and all drinks with parasols, flowers and colored straws.

It was a lot of work with the themes, but it paid off in dividends. I was able to increase the base salaries of all long-term staff and had extra cash to hire out of work actors, models and musicians to be a part of the entertainment mix. Before I left, I had scenic painters and a props person.

I only ever painted one element myself, from scratch, the dragon adjacent to the DJ booth, during a hell theme. I was quite proud of my artistic ability, largely done while high on booze and substances.

Sometimes a theme would last for a couple of weeks, sometimes I would change it twice a week. This concept worked so well, particularly since nobody knew when the changeovers may happen.

Our intentionally over the top garish drag shows never stopped the flow of the evening, and were performed on the bar, on tables, on top of the cigarette machine near the front door, in the DJ booth, on top of the bass speakers near the dance floor, and once on a bungee swing over the dance floor. Think a hairy man sporting a tilted orange wig, one eyelash up, one upside down, with smeared lipstick and dressed in fabulous couture, often with massive scenic hats (a scale model of the Sydney Opera House was favorite), throwing sarcastic shade at customers walking past, often "copping a feel", and singing along in good harmony, but in the wrong key, to a 1980's pop hit. These were ocker Australian drag characters, similar to what can be seen in the later movie *"The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert"*.

With the exception of private mid-week event nights (usually fashion shows), it was important to me to keep the "beat" of the music continuing all night, to keep people from getting tired. Stopping the music for a show at its peak would have been a disastrous concept, which I never allowed on weekends. The drag performers worked with my DJ's to our music, not the other way around.

By 1985, *The Beat* was now a notoriously well known destination club. People from other cities would come to Brisbane in solidarity. Queensland anti-gay laws were the talk of Australia. The owners of both of Sydney's most well-known openly gay bars Exchange and Patches on Oxford Street came up and offered their support in any way to me. They placed promotional materials in their own bars and held raffles to win a bus trip to *The Beat*. It was *Priscilla* ahead of its time.

The Australian gay community was rallying against the Queensland government and it's last bastion of homophobia.

Young gay boys came out of the closet to become activists, protesting the Queensland government, joining local Queensland chapters of National Groups such as Campaign Against Moral Persecution (C.A.M.P.). Fashion designers incorporated pink triangles into leather jackets and customers brought recorders to the club to videotape the police



	
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Brightly colored and massively sculpted wigged drag queens upped their fabulously couture and silly games and left *The Beat* at 6am to hang around conservative church doorsteps in their churchgoing finest on the Sunday mornings including resident drag personalities Bambi, Chanelle, Tiffany Jones, Hazel LaBelle, Brandy Renee, and my headliner, Trixie Lamont.

Thinking about these fabulous queens, *The Beat* maintained a bevy of major Queensland drag icons that enjoyed a cocktail or 10 regularly... For example, we enjoyed hosting the cantankerous bitch Freda Mae West (President of the Master Hairdressing Association), Dame Sybil von Thorndyke (co-founder of Brisbane's annual Queen's Birthday Ball) and the legendary showgirl from *Les Girls*, Toye De Wilde, who in 1987 was a candidate in the by-election riding the social tidal change that was in the air against Bjelke-Petersen's regime. Each of these fabulous queens turned heads on arrival and were great company to listen to their stories.

Even journalists would regularly come to *The Beat* hoping to catch a police action against our customers or us.

One of these journalists, an undercover reporter for the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Commission) was a regular at *The Beat*, and while initially engaged to report stories to try to bring us down, converted to becoming a loyal supporter and refused to file the stories that the ABC wanted resulted in becoming a lifelong friend.

Politicians, TV & Radio personalities came to drink, party or play. Various music celebrities made *The Beat* an 'in-place' late at night after a local concert to unwind in relative privacy and/or show their support against the ridiculous antiquarian silliness of the government

The 'Sisters of the Order of Perpetual Indulgence' a Sydney based facetious anti-religious, sarcastic pro-gay group setup a Brisbane chapter, based at *The Beat* after a consecration ceremony, with my now assistant GM nicknamed "Patch" being ordained as 'Mother Inferior'. It was here at *The Beat* that I too was 'ordained' as '*Mother Mame Dennis*', a pun on the musical *MAME*, for my 'carefree, fun spirited, galivanting, globe-trotting, intoxicating, highfalutin, bon vivant leadership'.

The Boy from Oz, Peter Allen, was a quasi-fixture at *The Beat* when in Brisbane to/from his retreat in Oak Beach, Port Douglas. By late 1985, the opposite of his stage persona, the quiet and reserved bi-coastal Peter was living in California, but still called Australia home. Since his divorce from Liza Minnelli (whom Judy Garland had connected him with), his post-Liza partner Greg (who was also Peters tour & lighting manager) had passed away from AIDS, and he met my boyfriend of the time, Shaun (another big-haired model) at *The Beat*. The 2 of them hit off, and Shaun abruptly dumped me to head off with Peter up to his Oak Beach retreat and then back to SoCal. Upsetting at the time, as it turns out, this was a godsend since it freed me up to meet the love of my life a few years later.

Years later, I would go on to work with [Liza Minnelli](#) twice, both in concert and in my Broadway musical

VICTOR/VICTORIA.

Over the years, other entertainment personalities such as Harris Milstead (Divine), Culture Club, Keith Haring, David Bowie, Wham! (George Michael) arriving by limousine at the front door (and more often, quietly by minivan at our back door down Lucky Lane) making *The Beat* their discreet place late at night after local concert engagements.

The Park Royal Hotel (where 99.9% of all pop stars routinely stayed) whose manager was a regular, considered us the new "in" alternative later night club, and would privately recommend us to his V.I.P. guests. Sometimes they came just to drink, and sometimes to show solidarity with our cause, and nearly always, both.

Even the New Zealand All-Blacks Rugby team came, and partied, and had respectful fun, which caused a parking lot bloody fight with the Queensland Rugby Players wanting to 'poofta bash'. Fortunately, the All-Blacks won.

Lucky of Lucky's Trattoria was often seen screaming in an animated Italian way at the anti-gay bashers at the parking lot across the street from his restaurant to anyone he deemed homophobic at the time.

Our door staff were predominantly experts in the Zen Do Kai freestyle martial art system that originated in Australia, whose philosophy encompasses the principle of "if it works, use it" and as such contains elements of a variety of other martial arts. They were uber gay friendly, reserved and protective of our customer set.

We stored signage and made space available upstairs of *The Beat* for creation of signage and banners. Even journalists would regularly come to *The Beat* hoping to catch a police action against our customers or us. Sometimes these journalists were friends, sometimes they were just after "the back story".

Queensland Courier Mail print journalist Phil Dickie and ABC TV Four Corners '*The Moonlight State*' (May 1987) reporter Chris Masters (who came up from Sydney to investigate) were likely the most famous for researching and reporting stories on organized crime and police corruption, with a substantial monthly bribery trail (called "The Joke") which led to The Fitzgerald Inquiry.

Jack Herbert, known as the 'Bagman' reportedly collected more than \$3 million in protection money that allowed illegal gambling and prostitution to flourish in Brisbane as part of 'The Joke' which would come crashing down after a series of stories in The Courier Mail newspaper and the broadcast of *The Moonlight State* on Four Corners in May 1987. Herbert would become the Fitzgerald Inquiry's star witness, telling all in exchange for immunity from prosecution.

I should also be clear that around this time, I was asked (not by Gerry or Vic, but rather by a vice-squad policeman) to help match-up Phil Dickie or Chris Masters with an underage date, presumably, to use as a silencing tactic — I never followed through. It was around this time I saw the writing on the wall to leave, since the 'wagons were circling' a little too close to home.

In addition to owning *The Beat*, and other clubs, Gerry and Vic 'apparently' owned illegal casinos and massage parlors and admitted making \$1 million a year from gambling while police turned a blind eye. Interestingly, both were anti-drugs.

Amidst various anti-gay, anti-police, anti-government, anti-anything campaigns by news media, print, radio, and TV, grabbing at straws trying to sell advertising, *The Beat* became more and more popular, proving there's is no such thing as bad press and we expanded the space accordingly.



	
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Lucky McDonalds vs Government

The licensing authority was attempting to shut us down on technicalities. To get the liquor license, we had to declare *The Beat* as a bistro that operated under a restaurant license (even though only 1 in 1,000 customers wanted food). Of course, we did not have any.

Complicating matters was that for years, since the end of the *International Restaurant & Ravioli Bar*, the kitchen had not been renovated and had significant damage caused by the *Torino's* fire. To restore a commercial kitchen would be extremely cost prohibitive. A couple of burners on the stove and large walk-in fridge were about the only things that worked, and even those were on last legs.

In order to maintain our ability to serve alcohol, over time, I utilized either student chefs, greasy spoon bicycle deliveries, grocery shop chips and other pantry items. On a tip off from friends inside the police, a few days before a licensing raid, a regular lesbian customer and fan of *The Beat*, who owned the franchise license for the local McDonalds restaurant, and I put our funniest plan in place.

I would give her and her staff free entry and a bunch of free drink vouchers (she was a lesbian boozier), in exchange for 2 or 3 times a night bringing over all the 30-minute old, un-sold de-branded hamburgers, chicken nuggets and chicken sandwiches destined for the bin. We setup a completely fake kitchen at the rear corner the main floor at *The Beat*, with a large working refrigerator (we used for champagnes and wines chill), non-working oven, used pots and pans and a glass display counter with all the McDonalds throw-a-ways. We removed all the McDonald's branding and placed these sumptuous fast-food feasts directly onto cheap plates with *The Beat* branding – just a toothpick with a paper flag printed with *The Beat* logo on it.

One of my glass picker-uppers was tasked with watching for anyone suspiciously looking like undercover police or licensing squad and then immediately go stand in the 'kitchen' ready to serve, pretending to be the cook.

Sure enough, when the licensing raids came, they were unable to do anything, since we had complied with our license, as disgusting as it was. The funny part, some customers got the munchies and bought the aged McFood and enjoyed.

This went on for about another year. Indeed, inspired by the new Liquor Act making it an offense to serve deviants, we re-branded our diner accordingly.

Our neighboring restaurant, *Lucky's Trattoria*, which was additionally a money laundering front for the local mafia was partially owned by a short, stout and lovely Italian man named Luciano ("Lucky") who took pride in his restaurant. He also enjoyed the increased business from *The Beat* as we got busier, and over time, Lucky became super gay friendly, and his restaurant stayed open until the wee hours of the morning, adjusting his closure time based on how busy we were by the hour.

Overnight, *Lucky's Trattoria* became the gay and drag queen restaurant of choice, Luciano loved the attention.

Lucky's son became a regular at *The Beat* and seeing his own franchise opportunity put in menus, used his *Lucky's Trattoria* kitchen to cook, and supplied sample dishes to put in the display cabinet. When someone ordered, one of our staff would run out our backdoor, down the back alley of Lucky Lane to Lucky's kitchen and bring back the dish to serve.

I coined "Lucky Lane" as a triple entendre based on adjacent *Lucky's Trattoria*, the "L" shape of the delivery lane, and the outdoor sex that would occur in our dark, shattered beer bottle, used syringe and potholed rocky service alley – i.e. getting 'Lucky'. Much to Lucky's amusement, I had my resident designer paint a faux "Lucky Lane" street sign on the building wall at the entrance off Ann Street.

Falling Down the Rabbit Hole

To be honest, I tended to be wild, and do dangerous and crazy things randomly at *The Beat*, which looking back could be attributed to my quickly growing substance abuse.

The local police (vice squad) would sometimes give me an "8-ball" of cocaine, or a handful of LSD/acid drops they had captured in a recent drug haul and loved to share some of this with me in exchange for drinks, friendship and occasionally girls/boys to hang out with.

The cocaine always remained upstairs, hidden in little plastic bags inside a window air conditioner near my office, below the AC air exhaust fan. No sniffer dog could therefore smell it, and not even my police suppliers or staff knew where I stored it. To avoid entrapment, I only ever accepted the drugs in my upstairs office, and only after they imbibed first, in front of me.

In my early ays, the upstairs was a mix of both fire damaged floor, mould and a portion as an old casino. The latter part became my office until we repaired much of the fire damage to make the space more usable.

I was never, ever a pimp, but I was happy to connect the members of the force with those girls and boys I knew enjoyed the 'friends with benefits' schemes of the '80's then let them work it out themselves.

I admit that I was so damned promiscuous, my assistant manager, Patch, and our bartenders would sometimes sit certain boys at the bar stools in a sequence where they would bet amongst each other as to which boy would interest me the most. I would often pick one (or two) to join me upstairs in my office to play with. It was this weird game where I would walk behind the bar look at the line of boys and choose. I'm not proud of my promiscuous behavior those days, but in the early '80s this was considered 'normal' in the scene. I am so lucky to have been completely spared from HIV/AIDS.

I think cocaine saved my life, with the AIDS crisis now hitting Australia, and my promiscuity untamed, I did so much cocaine for a brief time, I couldn't have sex. By the time I weaned myself off the powder and I migrated towards more of the hallucinatory variety, there was more education about how to avoid HIV, and introduction of widespread condom use.

I had a piece of jewelry from House of Hung in Singapore that hid my tiny sheets of acid – basically each a ½ cm square of tissue paper with a micro-dot of acid on its centre, slid inside a hollow on a white gold pinkie ring. I would simply slide off my ring, and with a tongue damp finger, the tissue would stick to it, and I would place it on my tongue. Thus, I could discreetly take a 'hit' whenever I felt the urge while downstairs in the club, and nobody would be the wiser.

	
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Often at 7 or 8am, coming off a high, as I was leaving *The Beat* to drive to my home, I would stop by the sleazy roadside Windmill Café dump (later known as Greasy Harry's) on Petrie Terrace to load up on munchies style fried junk food, including fried potato scallops along with a fried breaded veal chop, typically munching it all down with one hand, while driving (my manual transmission car) with the other. Stuffing food between my teeth while changing gears with crumbs and grease dripping everywhere. How I never had an accident is shocking to me.

In addition to my favorite of drops of acid regularly at peak times, I was also becoming an alcoholic.

After a few years of living the bar life, Johnnie Walker was becoming my best friend, and it wasn't until one night I woke up on my dance floor around lunch time with the cleaners vacuuming our carpets nearby, where I was found laying on my back on our disco light up dance floor, with an empty bottle of scotch in hand, and the disco lights spinning and pulsating to only the sound of grinding motors (acid trips make you enjoy kaleidoscopes of color and movement), and the back of my head was wet in my own little pool of vomit.

I quit, cold turkey, there and then – no more booze or drugs.

After that change of life moment, my bar staff had specially marked liquor bottles for me, so when customers bought me drinks, I would, secretly, be drinking black tea and 7-up or soda. If customers watched, they saw my drink poured and thought was my known drink of choice, Scotch and soda.

I am by no means a nun, a few decades later, I occasionally still drink, mostly when out, and mostly wine and beer – usually never at home, unless a party celebration, and never alone.

Fortunately, I have always hated the smell of marijuana, and am too lazy to make the fiddly joints, plus I get headaches from it.

The last time I knowingly ingested any other substances was a long, long, long time ago.

Having lost a bet with my bosses, you could also find me, for a very brief time in the days of my substance abuse, at *World By Night*, when I was a (not so proud) [male stripper in a go-go bar](#).

The fine art of perception

When I was working as bar manager at the *Cockatoo Club*, a few times, in my wanderlust for travel I would pop up to Singapore for mid-week short stay and visit the House of Hung jewelry shop next to the Hilton Hotel on Orchard Road. Here, I would legally purchase raw uncut diamonds. You could travel across borders, including Singapore/Australia without any customs duties, if the diamonds were uncut and declared.

I would bring them back to *Cockatoo Club*, and on weekends, wait for people to get suitably drunk, and then say “Psst, wanna buy a diamond?” in a rather secretive way. Then discreetly roll them out onto a small black cloth at the end of the bar. Drunken customers would think this was stolen merchandise, and therefore think this would be a great deal. I would sell them for about 400% more than I paid – slightly less in price than if you would buy them at the Wallace Bishop Jewelry shop in Brisbane.

I would then split the profit share with Michael and later Jerry and some bar staff, and everyone was happy, including the customers that purchased. A few that had the diamonds cut/set into jewelry came back to buy more from me. The profits would more than pay for my next trip.

Decades later, Richard & Paul Hung, at the family-owned *House of Hung* shop in the Far East Shopping Centre, still remembered me, and we regularly shopped there, and sent family/friends who were visiting for family discounts. For a gay man, their shop name was very easy to remember.

Climbing Out of the Rabbit Hole

Typical Friday and Saturday club goers would now come during the week, just to ensure they didn't miss a scene change to a new theme. Business was building, most importantly the weekday business. I was becoming clean again – no more booze or drugs, and not so amazingly was getting a clearer head in decision making.

I think it was around this time I finally became an adult thinking entrepreneur, and no longer a boy living out a real-world addiction infused and  fantasy, yet my promiscuous vice remained.



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I handed out batches of secret complimentary door passes (to avoid cover charges) to hundreds of local cute (and typically big haired gay boys) on condition of secrecy, and never handed them out to women, ugly gay leeches, or knowingly straight men. I also targeted blonde surfer boys on the Gold Coast / Surfers Paradise, by visiting the few gay clubs with fistfuls of passes and promises of free drinks. I never solicited the clientele from competing clubs such as *The Terminus*, since keeping a happy scene was just as important, indeed, I tried to avoid visiting competitors bars and clubs for fear of misinterpretation.

The combination of what today would be called guerilla marketing, ensured that most of our regular customer base were hot, young, good looking, gay boys. Yet legally, everyone was welcome, if they paid the cover charge.

Further, realizing that profit on soft drink is MUCH higher than that of alcohol, I would designate some late-night hours to be soft-drink only bar times. This had an additional benefit of pacing my customers alcohol levels, keeping them partying (and spending) for longer, often until 7am. The cost benefit analysis is simple, and one of the secrets of the bar trade to this day, as an example:

Indeed, much to the chagrin of some customers, I believe we were the 1st bar in Australia to start charging for a glass of water (which was becoming common as the drink of choice with tweaked out acid heads). We charged \$1 to cover ice, glass wash, breakage and bartender time, and initially got a lot of flack for it. Other bars quickly followed suit, and it no longer became a problem.

Suspecting some sticky fingers from my own bar staff within the bars, I instituted a "cash register control system" to make the bartenders THINK I was able to track cash and balance this with weekly alcohol consumption. I would be seen measuring bottles with a ruler stick, printing cash registers tape rolls, weighing bulk drinks, etc... Actually, it's impossible due to the combination of post mix syrup soft drinks, bottled beer and different prices of different alcoholic drinks. But my staff had not figured that out. A week after starting this fakery, I noticed the cash take consistently went up by about 10%.

A few months later, during a scene change, without saying anything to any of my bar staff, I had purchased half a dozen old 2nd hand security cameras, at the time, these were big clunky things. My handyman screwed each above the bar, pointing them generally towards the array of cash register tills. He stuffed the cables up into the ceiling tiles, so it looked like they were connected. He then put an old broken TV set in my upstairs office, along with an old clunky Betamax videotape machine below the TV. Again, all perception and nothing explicitly said to the staff. Indeed, these days, fake pretend security cameras, with a tiny blinking red light powered by a battery, are commonplace in most bars worldwide.

In the coming weeks, the weekly cash bar take went up again but this time by about a whopping 25%. Although I suspected a couple of them, I never worked out, nor cared, which of the staff had sticky fingers, since personalities (and sometimes their flirty looks) brought deep pocketed regular customers to the bar which made up for it in the long run. Most bars and restaurants assume a 10% theft rate by staff in their operations.

The combination of regular themed decor changes, secret door cover charge system, guerrilla marketing, soft drink spree at peak times and pretend anti-theft security measures was my key to building up the business from about AUD \$12,500 a week to over AUD \$40,000 in profit each week – in the mid 1980's.

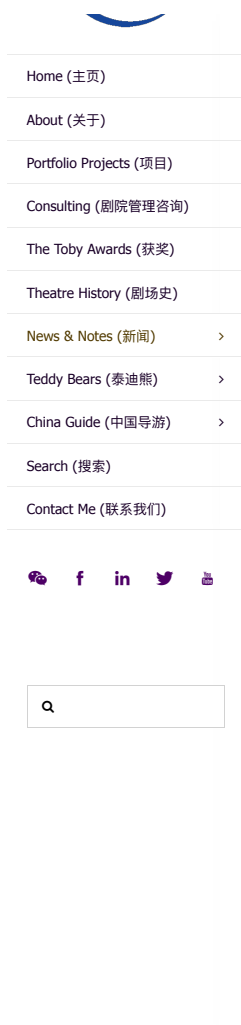
Delivering the "take" every Monday late afternoon to Gerry & Vic's office was also interesting. We had a slew of little canvas bank bags, and each week, the cash was counted and bundled by denomination and wrapped with a single rubber band. Each bank note domination bundle was put into its own canvas bag, at the time \$5, \$10, \$20 and \$50. The heavy \$1 coins, in another bag. The weirdly shaped and very heavy \$0.50 cent coins and below were never delivered, and instead used in our operational costs.

After retaining a cash float in my office at *The Beat*, I would take the bags together shoved into in a common department store shopping bag, for the 3 or 4 block walk to Gerry & Vic's office above their *Manhattan Club*, along with a single tiny piece of paper from my bookkeeper detailing in handwriting each bags value, plus a combined bag total note.

Gerry & Vic's General Manager, Robin, would simply place each bag on a kitchen weight scale on Robin's desk, and thereby know, almost accurately, how much each was containing. If the combined value of each of the collective bags was equal to, or more than the previous week, I was "good to go". If it was less, they looked for an explanation, and were always polite in those weeks.

Fortunately, nearly all weeks the combined value of the weight of the bags were getting heavier. If particularly heavy in a given week, they would often reach into one of the bags, usually the one containing the \$20 rubber band wrapped bundles and throw it at me saying "*good job kid*" – I would then divvy up this bonus with my key staff and lead DJ, which built loyalty and commitment.





After many years building the success of The Beat I moved to the USA in late June 1987 to pursue my Broadway career, after this cartoon of me appeared, sitting behind my desk, throwing cash in the air, (alongside my Assistant Manager, "Patch"), blocking traffic in the middle of Ann Street, with a silhouetted line up of patrons entering my club.

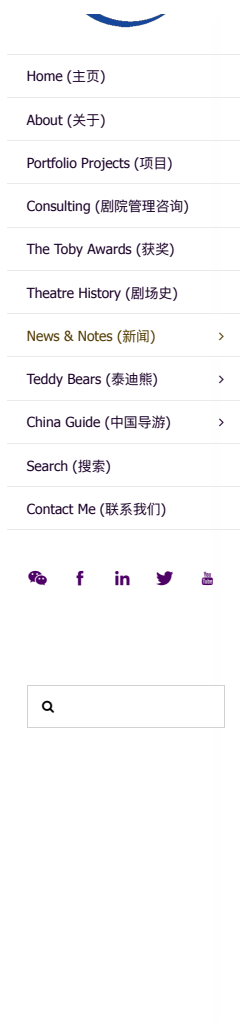
With the Fitzgerald Inquiry just launched, and with too much parental, government, and media pressure on me, I chose to buy a one-way ticket to return to the U.S.A., with no visa, with my money tied up in real estate, alone, cash penniless, but with a dream to return to my first love from my Queensland Theatre Company days, and aim for the theatrical pinnacle, Broadway.

I handed the keys to my apartment and car to Patch asking him to sell everything and send me the money (he didn't), and with reluctant approval from Vic and Gerry, I gave Patch the keys to *The Beat*, after a staff meeting to handover. Shortly after, Patch was moved to a smaller venue nearby, and I was replaced at *The Beat* by the fabulous Jan Conti as GM.

At a farewell party June 14, 1987, I was given the first dollar we received across the bar in 1983.

This is an extract from a farewell gift book the staff put together for me when I left for the U.S.A. including funny photos and descriptions from my staff.





It reads:

Presented to
TOBY SIMKIN
Founder & Manager
The BEAT
at a farewell event at
The BEAT
677 Ann Street, Brisbane
on
June 11, 1987

by it's staff and customers with grateful appreciation and love for creating our baby.

Classification: *Person of Interest*

Investigating Officer's Comments:

Simkin in his natural habitat above his den of indecency, adjacent to the blackjack tables, and sitting on his safe containing our police dept. future payroll.

Known to be practicing buggery and gross indecency on an industrial scale to actively attempt overthrowing Sir Joh, Simkin is the chief supplier of alcohol to perverts deviants, drug users, police and media.

Celebrated by the QLD mafia (if it exists), endorsed by int'l celebrities, ordained by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, championed by queer rights groups, focus of the Federal Police, investigated by his own father, adored by the local police, Simkin is the scourge of Brisbane, and after so many years running pooftaville is being extradited to the USA next week.

RECORD OF INTERVIEW: Simkin, T., Cont'd page 69

Indignantly replied: *"I did not insert my penis in his anus, he was just having difficulty walking across the waterbed in stilettos and overbalanced and fell on it."*

I then asked the defendant whether he'd ever been subject to cross-examination in the past, and he said yes, occasionally. Further enquiries revealed he was under the misunderstanding that I had been asking about cross-dressing, and he was therefore charged with additional offenses, including causing public affront (and back) and masquerading as a man, and masquerading as a manager.

A charge of gross indecency was dropped at this point as the defendant admitted to only having been indecent 143 times.

I then asked whether the defendant was accustomed to sitting in police officers laps whilst being interviewed in full leathers, to which he replied: *"Only when I'm giving the dictation and you're taking it all down."*

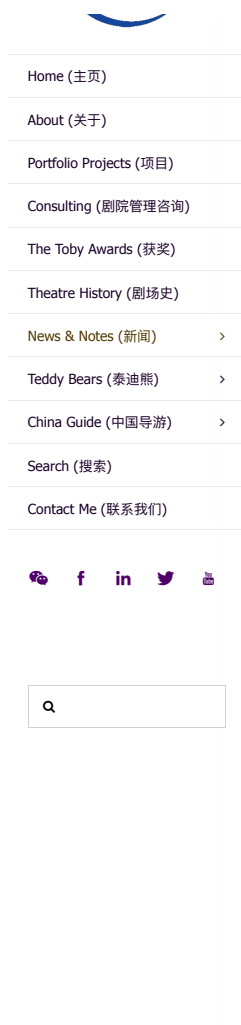
Subsequently, I became aware of a sudden increase in the weight of my wallet in my inside coat pocket and I left the room to deal with this painful ailment, which afflicts me quite often (see Medical Certificate from Dr. Cory Rupt, 12, The Palms, Kingston, Jamaica).

When I returned, the defendant had gone.

[signed]

Det Sgt. Sen, Const. Super, Commissioner. 2169.





All's well that ends well

The Fitzgerald Inquiry (a judicial inquiry led by Queens Counsel Tony Fitzgerald) was commissioned in May 1987 by the Deputy Premier Bill Gunn (while 'old Joh' Bjelke-Petersen went to Disneyland), to investigate corruption, bribery and misconduct in the Queensland Police force, and the entire system of government. One of its recommendations was that a newly established Criminal Justice Commission review the laws governing consensual sexual behavior, including gay activity.

This proposal became core focus in the 1989 election. The National Party which was heavily implicated in corruption by the Fitzgerald Inquiry, tried to solidify conservative support using his party's opposition to the legalization of gay conduct claiming that his party's corruption was a "secondary issue" to moral issues like homosexuality.

The Fitzgerald Inquiry spent years investigating long-term police corruption. Significant prosecutions followed the inquiry leading to 4 ministers being jailed and numerous convictions of other police.

Former Police Commissioner Sir Terence (Terry) Lewis was convicted of corruption, jailed, and stripped of his knighthood, and former Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen was charged with perjury.

It also led to the end of the National Party of Australia's 32-year run as the governing political party in Queensland.

Shortly before his defeat, Premier of Queensland, Russell Cooper (and Police Minister) of the National Party said, a Labor victory would, "open the floodgates and see a sea of sodomites flooding into Queensland."

The new Labor Government buoyed by a landslide victory swiftly implemented changes in the Criminal Code which repealed the anti-homosexuality laws on 19 January 1991.

In 1991, Gerry Bellino and Vic Conte were charged with tax-avoidance offences. Gerry Bellino, a friend of Jack Herbert (the bagman collecting bribes for police commissioner Terry Lewis), was jailed in 1991 for 7 years after The Fitzgerald Inquiry for paying bribes of \$17,000 a month to police as part of the 'The Joke' scheme. He was released in 1999. Vic Conte was also jailed in the aftermath.

With the departure of Gerry & Vic, in 1989, John Hannay who had left Brisbane after the 1973 firebombing of the *Whiskey Au Go Go* nightclub which he managed, and which claimed 15 lives, returned from North Queensland, and acquired *The Beat* and his family have operated it since.

The Beat is still in operation today, indeed it's the longest running club with the same name in Australian history, and in its own way, is a landmark in LGBT Queensland history.

Today, Australia is one of the most gay-friendly countries in the world.

All's well that ends well.

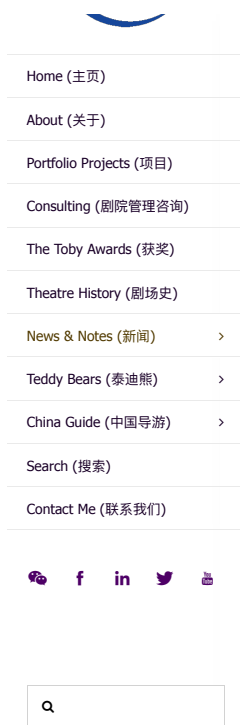


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Memories from the '80's

Extract from a farewell gift book the staff put together for me when I left for the USA.

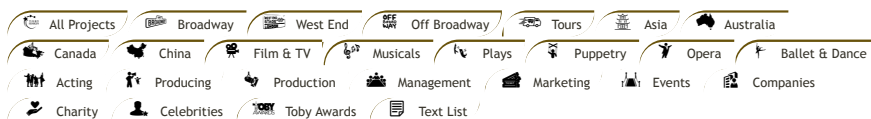




Hall of Fame

If there was a **Hall of Fame** from the 1980's, it would be something like this:

with special mentions to Lucky Luciano, Neil Bills, Kelly & Derek Quinn, Lisa Griffiths, Brandy Renee, Tim Thor, and the hardest working guy on staff, Rob Ettinger.



<https://TheatreInChina.com>
Facebook #PreservingHistory1ShowAtATime

DJ *Baby* was our lead DJ, Here in the booth (built on steel and concrete pylons extended through club floor to avoid bass speaker vibration for the turntables), and great friend Neil Bills running dance floor lighting behind *Baby*. My favorite song at the time of Robbie Nevil's *C'est La Vie* was permanently retired from the club on my departure.



