

Case Studies

Home is sometimes the Least Safe space

His father bashed Tony in front of his weeping mother after some 'disgusting gay' magazines were discovered under his bed. Tony went berserk and trashed the house and returned a beating to his father - then he locked himself in the bathroom and refused to come out.

Although reluctant, eventually after six hours Tony's mother called the police for help. The police asked for instructions from Tony's parents. While the parents refused to press charges they asked that Tony be removed from the house.

The Police removed Tony and took him to a regional shelter run by a religious organisation. After two days and realising that he was seen as a 'perverted oddity' by the shelter workers, Tony left Tasmania bound for Sydney on the boat after being given money to get to Devonport.

In Sydney Tony was befriended by a worldlier man who 'took him in' after 'turning a trick' with him. After some time the relationship turned violent when Tony would not comply with the bizarre sexual demands of his 'friend'.

Seven years later Tony returned to Tasmania with a faithful and loving companion - both HIV positive. Tony is reconciled to his parents, but it was all so unnecessary.

Pubs are Dangerous Places for Some eople

Janine (18) lives in a small southern Tasmanian Community and works in the local pub as a cook. Janine is a lesbian who has not 'come out to her parents', but has spoken to some friends - one of whom has betrayed her confidence and exposed her to a 'homophobic friend' who is now 'out to get her'.

One afternoon the 'homophobic friend' and drunken accomplices walk in to the pub and call out for Janine to appear - when she does she has beer thrown all over her and is abused as a 'dyke slut'. Staff working behind the bar come to her aid and order the drunken 'friends' out of the hotel. The friends 'lose face' as the other hotel patrons abuse them as they leave the premises.

That night the windows of the hotel are engraved with homophobic graffiti naming Janine. Local leaders of the GLBTI Community are confused as to how to support Janine without exposing her to her parents and the rest of the community. Janine does not want to make a statement to the police, as she is fearful of a public appearance and the further violence she will be exposed to.

In the end the hotelkeeper resolves the situation in his own way by calling in the suspected 'friends', tells them that he knows what they have done and demands regular payments to replace the glass. Because the hotelkeeper knows the drug involvement of the people concerned and tells them this, regular payments are made and peace is somewhat restored. **But Janine still lives in constant fear of being publicly 'exposed' and decides to move to the mainland.**

A Local Safe Space Initiative

A couple of gay guys have moved into a rural southern Tasmanian town and notice that other gay guys are very hard to identify, as there is a 'go very quietly' environment in public spaces. "How are we going to make friends?" is the issue. They go down town every day to have a 'cappuccino' in the local 'alternative' green coffee shop and art gallery called GLO.

Nick and Granger contact the League of Gentlemen Chapter and suggest that someone sets up a 'gay friendly' function at GLO. After a meeting in the Coffee Shop, a Saturday 'brunch' is quickly organised. **A start to GLBTI and friends affirming their space in town from an initial safety zone - great work guys & a lot of fun!**

Case Studies

Even Our Dogs are not Safe

Peter and Michael have moved to a rural southern township in Tasmania with their two corgi dogs. They have both come to Tasmania to retire, attracted by the slower and pleasant life-style in the State.

They bought a heritage-listed house and in the first week the 60-year-old cypress hedge burns to the ground in the middle of the night. The fire brigade notify the local police as fire accelerants have been used. The case is never solved and Peter and Michael are too frightened to push the matter or to replant the hedge. Life returns to normal after a while and friendly neighbours never comment on the burnt out hedge.

One day, when Peter is walking the dogs and passing a house about a kilometre from home, he is accosted by their neighbour, apparently drunk. Swearing at him and abusing him in a loud voice as 'a f***ing poofter faggot', he says "I am going to kill you and your f***ing poofter dogs."

Michael & Peter have put their home up for sale and plan to get back to the anonymity of city life. The 'incident', which was repeated a few times, was never reported to police.

The local gay community offered to support the couple, but the threats were too real for Michael & Peter to believe that something further would not happen in the middle of the night.

I am Dying to Come Out

I am a 67-year-old man, married with two loving daughters and a wife and not out. I know that I am always seen as a 'perfect gentleman'. I am dying from prostate cancer and have only a short time to live, so my name does not matter.

I have always preferred the 'company of men', having attended a single-sex all-male high school in Hobart, Tasmania. I was a very successful Australian Rules player and made the school team, going on to play in one of the State teams. It was there that I had my first sexual experiences with other men, but never went on to form a 'same sex relationship' as I was always frightened to lose the love of my family. I had several 'beat experiences' that did not fulfil my hope of a loving relationship - being the romantic that I have always been. I was badly beaten up on one occasion and this fear has lived with me all my life.

My family has always been my life, but the 'love of men' has been my hidden, driving, constant passion that is never far away in my thoughts and expectations.

I joined the League of Gentlemen when it was first started because it offered me the company of other men in a safe environment, but it also presented me with difficulties in explaining my absence to my family. I loved the social events and the friendships that I made from them.

When I was diagnosed with cancer I wrote to the convenor to ask him to terminate my membership of the League. This was very hard to do, but I was terrified that when I died someone would discover my secret and my family would be so hurt, with no end to their double grief.

Case Studies

A Too Often Told Story

Laurence's Story

Laurence grew up a Catholic in a northern Tasmanian rural town. He was always considered to 'be different', in that he was very sensitive and gentle to the extreme in his personality.

He was certainly considered different at the local Catholic school, and often bullied by other boys. He was considered by the teachers to be 'angelic' and probably headed for the priesthood because he was sensitive, reflective and spiritual in his bearing. Laurence's parents were 'mixed' in their religious adherence, his father was Catholic and in an important administrative position in town. His mother was a Uniting Church member and very close to Laurence. She had signed a pledge to bring her children up Catholic. There was another son, Michael, in the family - both boys were close and always supported one another at school. Michael, being the eldest and more self-assertive, always defended Laurence from bullies who tended to 'zone in' on him. Unfortunately, Laurence took to heart the moral teaching of the parish priest and religious school teachers in the Catholic High School, who unhealthily and too often condemned homosexuals as 'mortally sinful and headed for hell unless they converted from their evil ways'.

As Laurence grew older he realised that the Church was talking about him, as he became conscious of his growing attraction to the men around him, especially one of the teaching religious brothers. He had become an altar server because of this attraction and the 'safety' in being around a male group in the Church. Laurence developed a strong guilt response to his feelings and fantasies. In trying to get relief from this guilt, he disclosed his feelings in confession, only to be further condemned and urged to extreme acts of penance and self-denial. Laurence's parents were concerned at the sense of unhappiness they perceived in their son, but gained no insights from teachers and professionals in his life as to its cause. His father grew impatient about the refusal by both his sons to accompany him to Mass each Sunday and his perception of his sons' growing cynicism and unusual anger about the Church. While Michael had an understanding from intuition about his brother's difference, he was loyal and uncommunicative about it all. At some stage Laurence confided in his older brother regarding his sexuality and the bond was sealed, a huge burden on Michael.

To start work Laurence had to leave home and live in the provincial town, as he had gained an apprenticeship in a large hotel and entertainment complex. Within six months of starting work Laurence had suicided. The investigation brought no understanding to his parents, beyond the comment of the police that 'there was some evidence of bullying at work from comments on the toilet wall'. The coronial inquiry and investigation gave no reason or motivation for the suicide. In Laurence's parents' opinion the right questions were not asked and everyone seemed to be in denial. They were desperate in their grief to understand and find some meaning in Laurence's terrible final act. Stories were rife in town. People actually crossed the road to avoid the family. Michael finally broke his silence to tell of Laurence's awful burden and secret - he was also at breaking point and has never recovered from his depression.

Laurence's mother blamed herself for having signed the pledge to bring her sons up Catholic, as she felt she had signed Laurence's death warrant. The parents travelled to Hobart to meet the Archbishop to explain their anger at the Church and to request some change in attitude and responsibility from the organisation - they gained no joy.

A Uniting Church Minister, a friend of Laurence's mother who was in contact with other parents of gay sons and daughters who had similar stories to tell, brought people together into a network of support and to work for change. People have gained some sense of closure from this group - but none has recovered from the sadness and deep depression in their lives.