

## T IS FOR

**Teens** "We live in a world without Mardi Gras," Michael Wilson, founder of gay and lesbian youth website Mogenic.com, told *Sydney Star Observer* when asked about young people's attitudes to the iconic festival last year. Wilson's statement was unequivocal but not quite accurate, as the strong youth presence at this year's Sleaze party showed. But his matter-of-fact comment did prove something: as tolerance improves, many gay and lesbian teenagers are prepared to challenge the narrow definition of the queer community and where they belong in it. Unfortunately not all gay young people's experiences are as positive as Wilson's, and same-sex attracted teens still hit the headlines for the wrong reasons. A national survey of people aged 14 to 21 last year found nearly half had been abused because of their sexuality. In the US, gay and lesbian children of conservative religious families have been enrolled in "ex-gay" courses to "cure" them of homosexuality, and "ex-gay" advocates are reportedly targeting Australia too. But they may be frustrated, if last year's national survey is any guide. Despite being more likely to suffer abuse, more than three-quarters of the young gay and lesbian respondents said they felt good or great about their sexuality.

**Tim Conigrave** The Sydney-based actor and playwright, who also worked at ACON, wrote a moving account of his life in the book  *Holding The Man*, which detailed his experiences of coming out, negotiating gay relationships, dealing with homophobia and living with HIV. The book went on to become what is arguably Australia's favourite gay-themed book and reading it has become almost a gay rite of passage. In  *Holding The Man* Tim wrote about how, growing up in Melbourne during the 1970s, he struggled to come to terms with his sexuality when, to everyone's surprise, the boy he had a crush on at school, John – who happened to be captain of the football team – became his boyfriend and remained his boyfriend for 15 years. During the 1980s Tim studied acting at NIDA and he and John moved to Sydney, where their lives were turned upside down when they discovered they were both HIV-positive. Over the next few years Tim and John tried to make the most of the time they had left together. Sadly Tim died in October 1994, just after completing  *Holding The Man*. It went on to win the 1995 Human Rights Award For Non-Fiction and has just been turned into a play, set to debut at the Stables Theatre (where Tim once worked) on 9 November.

# Keeping the faith

FOR 17 YEARS, GLENN BOYD KEPT HIS SEXUALITY QUIET AS A CATHOLIC PRIEST IN COUNTRY NSW. NOW HE IS A PROUD MEMBER OF GAY CHURCH MCC AND ORGANISER OF COMMUNITY DISCUSSION GROUP QUORUM.

I was born and bred in Albury. After school I started working there, but I eventually found work as a public servant in Dee Why. I was living at Manly and like a lot of Catholic boys at that time I had thought about being a priest.

Church was important to me, and priests were able to make a difference to people's lives. I was also attracted to the theatre of it too. In my early days Mass was still in Latin.

In 1980 I started studying for the priesthood at Manly. I was 23. In 1985 I was ordained a deacon and in 1987 I was ordained a priest.

I always knew I was gay. I don't think I was hiding or suppressing that by entering the priesthood: being a priest was what I felt I was called to do. But sexuality wasn't something that was discussed among other seminarians.

The church wasn't good at talking about sexuality at all. Celibacy was talked about occasionally, but at a serious level where people were able to explore who they were, that just wasn't part of our training.

In summer during the seminary days when I was down at the beach and I saw couples together, there were times when I became quite lonely and felt there wasn't one particular person in my life whom I could have a relationship with. Those times were difficult.

There were also times when the studies got a bit much. But it wasn't until the mid-1990s that I formally embraced my sexuality and said, "This is who I am and I have nothing to worry about."

That's when I started thinking about my future in the church. I had to consider whether to remain celibate but celebrate my sexuality, as some gay priests are able to do, or whether I needed someone in my life to embrace and love and be loved by.

It was the decision that I did need somebody else that then started me thinking about



Photo: Ian Gould

whether to remain a priest and hide the relationship or leave and be public about it.

I chose the latter. It wasn't an easy decision and it took a number of years. I had to tell the bishop about my departure. It had its tense times, but ultimately it worked out.

I also had to deal with questions from people I knew about why I was leaving the priesthood. I was part of the last parish I served in, in country NSW, for nine years. I had to leave the sense of being involved with those families on a really deep and intimate level, knowing that would probably not be a part of my life ever again.

Probably my parents and two sisters struggled with me leaving the priesthood more than I did. I had a sense of hope and potential whereas they were mourning a death in a sense.

Now my two sisters are coping with it a bit better than Mum and Dad. Probably my mother struggles more than anyone in my family. Like a lot of men of his generation, Dad never talks about things on a deeper level. I don't

know whether Mum's angst is with the fact that I'm gay or that I have left the priesthood.

I left the priesthood after 17 years in 2004. There were times when I wondered about the future and what to do next. I moved to Sydney because jobs in the country were difficult to come by and I wanted to start a new life and really embrace my sexuality. I finally found work with a firm of funeral directors in Leichhardt, where I am still.

Now I have somebody in my life whom I love very much. We met in September 2004 and we've been together ever since.

This is my first full-on relationship. For 14 of my 17 years as a priest I was celibate. But having finally embraced my sexuality, there were a couple of occasions where I met men whom I felt attracted to and would want to settle down with. I've had to learn a lot in the couple of years that my partner's been in my life. There has been a real growth there. It's been a wonderful experience.

My energies are with Metropolitan Community Church

at the moment. In 2002 I went to New York. I was aware of MCC but not really sure what it was about. I thought, while I was in New York where no one knew me, I'd suss it out. I went to a service and felt very comfortable.

I started going to MCC in Sydney and very quickly felt welcome there. I didn't have to leave any aspect of me at the door. I have been on the MCC board for 12 months and I have started a program called Quorum. It is a service for people in MCC and the wider GLBT community, to look at the important issues in a very casual setting.

We have looked at issues such as mentoring youth. Upcoming topics include racism in the GLBT community and the rise of the religious right. Next year we might look at issues like depression and ageing in the gay community.

Since moving to Sydney, I have also helped produce a booklet called *Love, Loss And The Law*. I did it with the Inner City Legal Centre and it came out earlier this year.

**As a priest and working at the funeral home, I have been very distressed to see how the same-sex partner of someone who has died has sometimes been treated.**

**At best they might be mentioned as "Mary's good friend". At worst the partner was never given any role to play in planning the funeral or anything.**

The booklet looks at legal issues affecting the surviving partner. It's getting same-sex couples aware that there are issues and it's best to sort them out now.

#### Interview by Ian Gould

**info** Quorum is held on the last Monday of each month, with a break in December and January. For more information call 0438 690 921. *Love, Loss And The Law* can be downloaded at [www.iclc.org.au](http://www.iclc.org.au).

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