



Jeremy Fisher

Letter To My Children

DEAR X AND Y

When I found myself seated next to you both at last night's alumni function and heard you speak so enthusiastically of your engagement and your planned marriage next year, your work in Young Labor and the students' movement, and your involvement with the Uniting Church Synod, I was reminded of myself at your age.

Except for the Synod, of course, although I once sang in an Anglican cathedral choir.

When I saw the two of you so comfortable with each other, open and acknowledged by the university and all the attendees at the alumni dinner, I almost shed a tear of joy at how far we have come over the years. In your young and enthusiastic wisdom, you both had some vague understanding of the history of that accomplishment. For myself, I was delighted to meet a young, Christian, same-sex couple who had announced their engagement and planned to marry and who had no difficulty accepting their sexuality.

“I met this young couple,” I said to Mongo when I arrived home, “both of whom have social consciences. They make me think of myself at their age. They even wave their hands with an almost zealous urgency when they speak like I did.”

“Uh huh,” he answered with that patient look he adopts when he sees me girding up for another quixotic trot.

“Don’t look at me like that. You’d like them. They’re engaged and they’re going to get married next year.”

“Why would that make me like them?” He raised an eyebrow and his wine glass to his lips.

“You just would,” I said a little huffily. I had drunk a few glasses of wine at the dinner after all.

“I think you’re suffering a paternal moment,” he told me before he returned his attention to the television.

Mongo was right, as he often is. I was having a paternal moment. But why not? The providence of our meeting instantly transported me back to my youth. I don’t deny I saw the two of you as spiritual sons and I wanted to share that past with you.

It was a different time. Gays like us faced different challenges. For one, we were invisible. There was no way my university would have invited me with my partner to a function with the Vice-Chancellor. In fact, after lodging a Freedom of Information request almost a year ago, I recently received the partial contents of my Special Branch file from the NSW Police Corporate Archives and have discovered my university was an active informant on me to Special Branch.

Not only does my file contain two “With Compliments” slips from the Registrar, my card entry shows that on “9.9.74: Inquiries through a reliable and confidential source within the Macquarie University revealed that J***** F***** was born on 9.11.54 and resides at 3 Earnshaw St., Gladesville”. I don’t know why Special Branch needed the University to confirm this information. None of it was secret or concealed as the many newspaper articles and pamphlets included in the file and documenting my then life as a gay, socialist activist confirm. I pity the poor clerk assigned the task of collating this dull information. But the fact is I was under surveillance mostly because I was homosexual.

Supposedly times have changed. Even so Special Branch continued to have an interest in homosexuals for many years after they finally lost interest in me. This was revealed through the suicide of Justice David Yeldham during the Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Force in 1996. Apparently Justice Yeldham liked sex with youths. Probably he didn’t ask them whether they were over 18. After all, in a public lavatory cubicle actions may well be more eloquent than words. *Green Left Weekly* claimed that Justice Yeldham’s activities had been known to and were covered up by Special Branch.¹ He gave evidence to the Royal Commission, then was found dead in his car of carbon monoxide poisoning. Did Special Branch manipulate Justice Yeldham’s judicial decisions through their knowledge of his activities? That’s a question for another place, but one we need to keep in mind in these times when governments and their security forces are exercising greater powers of surveillance over those with contrary points of view.

You, X, are likely already to have attracted some attention through your student activism. As a result both of you will be in some database somewhere. Thirty and more years apart, we still find ourselves under suspicion for our idealism.

Nevertheless life has changed. Mongo's sardonic raised eyebrow is one indication that, way back then, I wouldn't have been contemplating marriage. My commitment to Mongo would come much later and then only after ... but I'm getting ahead of myself.

When I was your age marriage was a heterosexist concept some of us, including me, opposed in the first gay rights march in Sydney in 1973. At that time the gay movement was only a few years old. It struggled with definitions of what it was and what it wanted. We used political terms as easily as you might send a text message, and with as much meaning.

Despite the political buzzwords, many of us simply wanted law reform. Remember, we were criminals then, our sexuality proscribed by law. As a consequence the vast majority of gays, fearful even of such a label, lived in the shadows, always cognisant of the repercussions of anyone finding out about our largely secret lives. If these were to be made public we could lose our jobs, be ostracised from our families and subjected to legal action.

There were others of us — a small minority, of whom, again, I was one — who argued idealistically, and in hindsight rather myopically, for much more radical social revolution which connected all the oppressed in the world — women, blacks, gays, the poor, peoples of the Third World.

We were young and had little to lose. We didn't have full-time jobs, careers or incomes to protect. It was a grandiose and unrealisable vision in which the concept of a gay subculture was simply a concept. Nevertheless, during the 1970s, despite our protestations and horror, that concept would slowly evolve into a reality.

You don't know anything about that, as you charmingly confessed with deprecating, downcast eyes. Politely, you rejected the hedonistic world of bars and clubs that has evolved over the past 30 or more years. "That is not our scene," you said. I could hear you repeating my own words from decades ago: It is so commercial and such a waste of energy, all those people enjoying themselves and ignoring the social and political problems facing Australia.

I laughed and you wanted to know why. It was difficult to explain. You are not even 21. You do not know a world in which you cannot even name what you are or what it is to be a criminal simply by existing. But then you also do not know a world without AIDs, mobile phones or the internet. And yet you care about the world, about life, the same way I do, in spite of your Christianity and your admiration for the Labor Party. Christianity I can forgive; Labor — well, they have only themselves to blame.

You have had your own battles in the Uniting Church Synod with people your own age condemning you for your love for each other. So the struggle for us to find a place where we can just be ourselves goes on.

As we can see in the newspapers almost every day, our newly won right even to live together remains under threat. Groups such as the Exclusive Brethren hate us and their covert involvement in politics in Australia, New Zealand and the United States is driven by their desire to see us criminalised once again.

The Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Peter Jensen (as well as his Catholic counterpart, George Pell), continues to regard us as an abomination and does not believe we should be equal to heterosexuals under law with regard to such things as accessing each other's superannuation. Even our first female Prime Minister refused us equality in marriage.

Last night you asked me questions about the past I could answer only superficially. But they set me thinking, and writing.

How could you know all the hidden history of our struggle to be ourselves? It is not taught in schools. It is often not even detailed in any written or oral records.

However, it is contained in the conversations and reminiscences of those, like me, who lived it.

Hence it could disappear with us. And then how would young people like you know what went on before?

You wanted to know. You wanted to know something of the past that you knew lay somewhere outside the pinnacle of your adolescent successes on the Central Coast and at Sydney Technical High School. These places, grudgingly, gave you the freedom to be yourselves. However, they could never give you any of the history we share because that history is almost unknown.

I want to tell you at least a little of my part in the movement that has created the space for the two of you to meet each other, become engaged and plan your marriage. Since 1973, I have lived my life in the hope that lives such as the ones you are leading would become natural. Way back then, there was no "gay lifestyle" and

no concept of becoming engaged or even married to another man. As a matter of survival, to get to where I am today I was forced to invent myself.

You were the ones who were curious as to how, so here it is.

Have you ever felt like killing yourself? I bet you have. Most people do at some time or another. Life's like that — ups and downs, ins and outs. But not everybody reaches the point where they decide to take their own life.

I did late in the evening of 26 May 1973 in my room at Robert Menzies College, an Anglican residential college of Macquarie University run by the Reverend Alan Cole. As I sat on the edge of the bed I cut deep into both my arms. Dark ripples of blood flowed down my arms into a black pool in my rubbish bin. I cascaded into that darkness.

I came back to life in North Ryde Psychiatric Hospital and here I am.

Alan Cole wouldn't let me back in his College unless I renounced my homosexuality. This was more of his "help". I took exception to that. The College was part of a supposedly secular university. It was publicly funded, though administered by the Anglican Church. I didn't believe it should impose Alan Cole's narrow views.

I took my concerns to the Macquarie Students' Council, then quite a powerful force on campus. I explained my problem with Robert Menzies College. Suddenly the Builders Labourers Federation (BLF) had green-banned the college over me. It was the first time anywhere in the world that trade unionists took industrial action in support of the rights of homosexuals.² The university administration reacted by implementing an inquiry into the incident. Not surprisingly, given the complicity of the

university in Special Branch investigations, this inquiry, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor historian and judge Rae Else-Mitchell, ultimately found that Cole was free to implement his narrow-minded Christianity within the confines of Robert Menzies College.

For a time I became a member of a Trotskyist group, as my Special Branch files show. I confess, however, that I was not a dedicated socialist. I was easily distracted by the sexual allure of other youths.

Both of you, X and Y, are so lucky to have found each other at such an early age and in a period when sexual fidelity is the favoured option. Back in 1973 those of us who were also Gay Liberationists felt it was our duty as sexual revolutionaries to break down sexual barriers. We regarded making love with other men, especially straight men, as a valid political activity. Many of the pretty young Trotskyists, though, might as well have been monks, so averse were they to any form of sexual activity. Perhaps, if religion had offered them a real chance to engage with the world, rather than its moral dictatorship, they might have been tempted more by Christ than Trotsky. As it was, Trotsky, at least as represented by many of his 1970s adherents, was as hidebound in ideology as Alan Cole.

My ideology was driven by far less noble motives, even if they were dressed up with the rhetoric of social and sexual liberation. I was very forward. My persistence was rewarded from time to time. A few of the comrades enjoyed a naked frolic or two, one or two of them proving surprisingly versatile when between the sheets or up against a wall. But I was lucky none of them ever thumped me.

Gay liberation remained at my political centre. We were out and we were determined to make our presence known. We would walk down the street holding hands or kiss on a bus. They were deliberately provocative acts and elicited noisy responses. It was an exciting time and we were literally creating a public vision of homosexuality out, loud and proud.

Today in the inner city I frequently pass same sex couples just like you walking hand-in-hand. Mostly they walk unhindered, practically unnoticed, by other passers by. I like to think that I helped in some small way to give you the freedom to be invisible.

At the same time, the commercial aspects of gay life were developing rapidly, although this was of peripheral interest to me. In the last year of my studies at Macquarie I had met a young man and moved in with him. Our lives revolved around political meetings and social activism but occasionally we went out into the new gay world. One night, we visited Costello's, an upstairs sleaze joint in Kellett Street, Kings Cross. It is now infamous through evidence presented by Channel 7 in its defence of defamation claims by the late John Marsden (Marsden won the case). While we were in the darkened bar enjoying a drink, the police raided. We had to give our names to the police; we gave false ones (Marsden gave the name "John Martin" when arrested by police at a beat). At this time both of us could have been arrested and gaoled for up to 14 years for the acts we did in bed together. But the police were not interested in that. The police openly took bribes from patrons—they took cigarettes from us as we had little else. We knew there was something wrong, both with Costello's and the police.

I did not see older men buying the favours of youths, even though in the Marsden case one Channel 7's witnesses (one of Anita Cobby's killers) said "he witnessed Mr Marsden having sex with his then 13-year-old brother Les in a cubicle at Costello's nightclub".³ I never saw any 13-year-olds there, but if an older man had offered me money to have sex with him, I may well have accepted. It would have fitted the general air of debauchery. But I might have lectured the older man on gay rights and sexual oppression. I was still a political evangelist.

Our political activity led to involvement in the first Mardi Gras in June 1978 but neither of us was arrested, despite the police violence: 53 people were arrested, 23 women and 30 men.

Two days later, there was a follow-up demo outside Darlinghurst Police Station and Court when the charges against those arrested were read out. The police barricaded the entrance to the court and seven more people were arrested.

The next day, the names, addresses and occupations of the 53 arrested were published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. This was a deliberate attempt to smear those people named. Historian Robert French has described how homosexuality was not a topic that made its way into the popular press much in those days. If homosexuality was discussed publicly at all, it was from a legal or a medical standpoint. Even then, as I demonstrated in 1982 in a survey of the two appropriate medical journals in Australia, the *Medical Journal of Australia* and the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, there had been only seven references to homosexuality in 50 or more years, all but one of which were book reviews.⁴ In the *Herald*, coverage of the topic was deliberately excluded by proprietor Warwick Fairfax, who lunched with his editor everyday to approve the paper's content.⁵ This

makes the paper's sudden detailed attention to the Mardi Gras arrests even more significant and a misuse of the power of the press to portray homosexuals as evil social misfits. I still wonder today how much collusion there was between the *Herald* and Special Branch.

To be fair, 1978 was a difficult year for the NSW Police. A bomb had gone off in George Street outside the Hilton Hotel, where a Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting was taking place, on Valentine's Day (14 February). The bomb killed two garbage collectors and a police officer. In February 1978, Premier Wran, briefed by Special Branch and in words that might have come post 2001, had blamed the Hilton bombing on international violence and terrorism.

My friends at NSW Special Branch spent months looking for the culprits. They eventually arrested Tim Anderson, Ross Dunn and Paul Alister of Ananda Marga on 15 June 1978 just nine days before the Mardi Gras march. Seven years later the Ananda Marga boys were released after it was proven they had been falsely convicted on the perjured evidence of a Special Branch agent provocateur named Richard Seary.

But in June 1978 the police were basking in their supposed success. In court they gave evidence suggesting the Mardi Gras marchers had attacked the police but the film and audio recordings taken by the ABC contradicted this evidence.

George Petersen, the maverick Labor parliamentarian, met Wran with barrister Carolyn Simpson of the Council for Civil Liberties on 4 July 1978 and raised his concerns about the 53 arrests.

In his memoirs, Petersen recalls that Wran blamed the Mardi Gras trouble on a small Trotskyist sect called the Spartacist League. I assume Special Branch gave Wran this misinformation since Petersen records how he had been invited to talk to the Spartacist League in June 1977 to discuss the fact that they had been infiltrated by ASIO, the national security organisation that had close links with NSW Special Branch. (A number of the records from my files have an added note “referred to ASIO”). Wran’s information about the Spartacists can be seen now as part of a general process of police misinformation in an attempt to portray the Mardi Gras as some communist, even terrorist, threat to public order. But the police case ultimately failed, although the last of the charges against the 53 arrested were not dropped until the end of 1979.

While the whole process took time, in the end the police came out of it rather sullied. As a result of much public discussion about their role in destroying the first Mardi Gras, the Summary Offences legislation was amended by Parliament so that the police could no longer arbitrarily refuse permission for public protest, which was a victory for freedom of expression as well as gay rights.

Gay liberation was still only a few years old, but we were slowly emerging from the darkness, feeling our way sometimes hesitantly and sometimes headstrong into the light. But the light was not only to fade, it went out.

It had nothing to do with police or church or politics. It was something in our blood.

In 1981, I was one of the first to focus on a curious gay cancer being reported in New York and San Francisco.⁶ At the time, researchers thought there might have been a

link between the cancers and the use of amyl nitrite as a recreational drug within the gay community.

By June 1982, the manifestation of odd cancers I'd written about in the *Medical Journal* had been given a name — AIDS — and it was clear that the syndrome had crossed the Pacific and was amongst us in Australia.

The first medical reaction to the syndrome was to blame it on “homosexual lifestyle”. Suddenly, not only was our lifestyle illegal it was life-threatening. This myth would be perpetrated as late as 1984 by some medical researchers and even today by some rabid homophobes. Promiscuous sex, especially anal sex, ingestion of semen and the frequent use of “poppers” (amyl nitrite) were all seen as part of the disease-causing and immunity reducing “homosexual lifestyle”. What this viewpoint ignored, though, was that women in Zaire, tiny babies and haemophiliacs were also dying of the same syndrome.

However, if you are being told by trusted authority figures such as doctors that your lifestyle will lead to cancer, opportunistic infections and an inevitable death, you get scared. In fact you are terrified. We didn't know whether we had it or not. We were all vulnerable to AIDS. It wasn't until the end of 1984 that it became clear AIDS was caused by a retrovirus-induced immune deficiency. Medical researchers didn't know much more about the virus involved, but they were quite sure how it was transmitted and that was through the exchange of contaminated blood or semen.

In this context, though the opportunities for openly gay writing were limited, I was making fledgling creative efforts. Three poems of mine were published in *Edge City on Two Different Plans* in September 1983. Margaret Bradstock, Gary Dunne, Dave

Sargent and Louise Wakeling, the editors of this first collection of Australia gay and lesbian writing, wrote that “many of the contributors are publicly speaking out for the first time about what is, for them, personal and individual and *still*, despite the remnants of liberal humanism, regarded as contemptible and threatening by a large section of society”.⁷ In his foreword to the book, Dennis Altman noted “that lesbian/gay writing is precisely writing which names the previously unnameable ... [and] that whatever homosexual feelings and emotions may have existed throughout history and across cultures, the idea of an identity based upon such emotions and behaviour is a comparatively recent and historically specific one.”⁸ Even so the book was reviewed in *Meanjin* under the heading “invisible people”.⁹

But we weren't necessarily invisible any more. Now, we were equated with the Grim Reaper. We were infected. We were dying. Instead of organising dances we were organising funerals. But at first we weren't writing about that. We weren't writing at all. We didn't have the time, let alone the inclination.

We were at war but the enemy was within us. The enemy is still there of course, but nearly 30 years later I can look back on those days with a sense of horror and disbelief that I imagine is very like the disconnected state in which a returned soldier finds himself. In a war, you do what you can to survive. You live with the fact that comrades die beside you, but you continue on until, through luck much more than design, you have survived. Yet, after the awfulness of the experience you have endured, that is something that cannot be celebrated. You simply go on existing, pretending you are a normal human being again.

If I believed in God, I would thank her that you were spared so much of that. Neither of you were born then. You do not know that it was our persistence to continue to be

ourselves, even in the face of death, that would give you the space to find each other and be yourselves. Those of us who had come out had no choice but to continue with our lives, never knowing whether or not we would find the virus had touched us with what was then its death sentence.

But fear drove many to continue to lead half-lives; married to women, often with children, but seeking sexual encounters with other men. They frequented and continue to frequent steam baths, sex clubs and beats. They continued to have unsafe sex. We managed at least to save you from those shadows.

I had a vision of the two of you back then, or at least of a world that had you in it, confident and free. This vision stayed with me. It was often the only thing that sustained me in the dark years of the 80s and 90s. Can you ever understand how wonderful it was for me to find my vision had become reality?

But it saddens me that you will never know such of my friends as John Terry, a wonderful, funny, Christian man who loved to sing in St James, King Street, his favourite church, and worked long, unpaid hours as a barrister for the Aboriginal Legal Service. His Special Branch file would be longer and more detailed than mine; he was always much more moral than I have ever been. His end in a quarantined section of an Anglican hospice was undignified and ugly. Or lithe, sensuous Stephen Kirby, a student of literature and editor of *Outrage* and the *Sydney Star Observer*, winner of "Sale of the Century"; he died blind and crazy. Or a young actor, Tim, with whom I had a romantic fling then lost touch. His book *Holding the Man* was published after his death, fittingly with no mention of me for I was merely a survivor.

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But even though you are confident and free, the world is still not a safe place for all of us gays. A 1998 study by MacDonald and Cooper suggests that homophobia and lack of support for a divergent sexuality are reasons for the escalating incidence of suicide among young Australian males.¹⁰

The two of you know what you faced in school and in church. You know the world does not automatically accept you. Nevertheless, despite the obstacles and the despair along the way, you have accepted the difficult but honest option that life in the open is preferable to a horrible separation from the rest of the world. And, of course, you found each other.

That in itself is some sort of miracle when the messages can be so mixed. Even today a late-coming¹¹ homosexual role model like High Court judge Michael Kirby can be accused under Parliamentary privilege of trawling for rough trade and putting himself at “grave risk of blackmail, entrapment, compromise and hypocrisy”¹² and using “a Commonwealth car to collect rent boys.”¹³

When the allegations were proved baseless (in fact fabricated), and his accuser Senator Bill Heffernan had to apologise to the Senate and resign from his official position as Cabinet Secretary, it was reported that the Prime Minister’s “extreme reluctance to bring his ‘friend’ Heffernan to heel ... after the senator’s careless intervention gave rise to an impression that somehow he had the Prime Minister’s implicit support”.¹⁴

Heffernan attacked solely because Kirby was gay (the Prime Minister might have had more Machiavellian reasons revolving around the composition of the High Court). He had support from commentators like I.C.F. Spry, who wrote in the

conservative *National Observer* that statements by Kirby “describing ‘homophobia’ as ‘intrinsically evil’” and openly admitting his homosexuality cast “doubt on the desirability of appointing to the High Court persons with lifestyles of which many Australians disapprove strongly. Generally at least, persons appointed as judges should be limited to those whose personal lives are acceptable to the general Australian community.”¹⁵ In other words, open homosexuals should not be judges. Remember this, because they are talking about us.

Kirby has given a fine account of his own views in the May 2000 issue of *Quadrant*. He records the aftermath of an address to students of Riverview College, Sydney, where he made reference to a joint statement by the Catholic and Anglican archbishops that had been made the morning of his address. The statement condemned the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, by then in its 22nd year! Kirby offered his own point of view on the statement, noting that his audience of boys looked and listened quietly. He condemned hate speech (the use of words such as poofter, queer, and faggot), gay bashing and harassment. He offered a contrary view to that of the churches by stating that a life of celibacy was not a practical solution for homosexual people. Then he made the very humane observation that “those who condemn and demand silence of the years of youth must wear the moral burden of the family rejections, suicides and the despair that the world of shame and silence brings”.¹⁶

Remember this as well. This is what we will face all our lives, the dilemma of life as a visible homosexual. On the one hand, we are vilified for declaring our sexuality; on the other, we remain well aware of the damage of silence and the need for people

who are not “acceptable to the general Australian community” to have a voice when faced with endemic homophobia.

Taken in their entirety, the attacks on Justice Kirby highlight the potential for a massive backlash against homosexuals. The xenophobes who call for war against Saddam Hussein and terrorism could equally as easily find enemies amongst the ranks of a homosexual sporting team, a gay choir, or a leather club.

A complacent acceptance of the current situation of homosexuals in a few Western, urban settings ignores the fact that Jews and homosexuals in Germany and Europe before and during World War II lived a similar existence, compartmentalised away from mainstream Germans, and easily identifiable because of their lifestyles.

The legacy of Jews is strong, however. They have narratives, stories and histories that go back 5,000 years. Our homonarrative is not as extensive; it consists of essays as fragile as this one. Should it disappear, it will be either because it is no longer a necessity for homosexuals, or because homosexuals themselves have “disappeared” and there is no need to tell their stories.

“We’ll get the bastards!” said Prime Minister John Howard.¹⁷ He was not slandering a judge with a false accusation of paedophilia, but referring to a bombing of a nightclub in Bali, which resulted in the deaths of many young Australians. I read these words in Berlin just after I had visited the *Topographie des Terrors*, a site opposite the new Ministry of Finance in the once-again united Germany. This poignant exhibit of Nazi horrors was then housed outdoors while a new complex was being built to preserve for posterity the everyday inhumanity of Nazi Germany. The exhibit was in the ruins

of the Gestapo torture cellars, bombed in World War II and left mouldering because of what they were and also their proximity to what became the Berlin Wall.

Although it was damaged in the exuberance of 1989, a remnant of the Wall shades the ruins, and is preserved as part of the whole display. In the ruined cellars are details of the codings used by the SS to denote the “crimes” by which individuals were sent to concentration camps. At the very bottom of the codings is the pink triangle used for *Homosexuellen*. Lauritsen and Thorstad note: “The triangle for all prisoners, except homosexuals, was about 5 cm large. The pink triangle was 2–3 cm larger than the rest because, as Heinz Heger explains in his book *Die Männer mit dem rosa Winkel*, ‘We were supposed to be clearly recognised as gays from a distance’.”¹⁸ The museum contains very little documentation of the arrests, torture, transport to camps, or deaths of the thousands of *Homosexuellen* killed by the Nazis. The Protestant Church of Austria has estimated at least 200,000¹⁹ were arrested though more recent sources state that between 20,000 and 30,000 were rounded up, with a 75% death rate.²⁰ What is most evident, though, is that because homosexuals were regarded with such contempt *no-one* cared about their destruction.²¹

On a walkway above the cellars, a photographic display chronicles the role ordinary German citizens had in the victimisation of socialists, Jews, and women who slept with “lower races”. Photograph after photograph reveals great crowds of ordinary people jeering shaven-headed women, Jewish businesses, and socialist “traitors”. The crowds openly laugh at these victims of persecution, many of whom are forced to wear placards carrying some slogan expounding their crimes: “I am a class traitor”; “I slept with Polish men”; “I stole from German workers”; or simply *Juden*.

The propaganda of the Nazis, which was innocuously presented as government information and decrees while all dissenting views were suppressed, helped in part to encourage ordinary citizens to observe this inhumanity and do nothing. Events such as Kristallnacht, the burning of the Reichstag, and the assassination of the German ambassador in Paris were used to justify frenzied round-ups of so-called subversives—and, mostly, the ordinary Germans accepted this.

In the cool Berlin air, John Howard's words sounded dangerously close to those used by the Nazis to round up their victims. Howard clearly indicated his dislike for homosexual judge Michael Kirby. Some of his closest advisers have called for Kirby to be removed from his position. Howard refused to give us any equality in relationships and their benefits and obligations. He was sustained in this by continuing widespread prejudice against us. In 2005, 42% of Australian men still believed that homosexuality was wrong.²²

As we know, buoyed by the fears and prejudices of such ordinary Australians, Howard's government, amongst other things, used a false presentation of official information relating to refugee children being thrown from boats to influence public opinion in the course of an election in November 2001, introduced draconian sedition and anti-terrorism legislation in 2005, and used this legislation to detain an Indian doctor, then revoke his visa, in 2007.

Today, the Australian public by and large is indifferent to a homophobic attack on a High Court judge, refugees being locked in concentration camps, changes to legislation giving the government powers of detainment and arrest for issues of national security, and a tightening of media coverage so that very little information critical of the U.S.A. or Australian governments is widely disseminated.

In themselves, these moves may not be fascism, but they represent a fundamental shift away from freedom of expression and acceptance of a diversity of views.

Regretfully I see that both our major parties have abandoned ethical decision-making in formulating their policies. All they are after is power.

That is dangerous for us because, as a minority, we are always vulnerable to populist policies. Our greatest strength, perversely, remains our newly identified economic power. Capitalist marketers have identified us as a highly influential market segment. With our ability to spend we have something that the *Homosexuellen* of Germany lacked. Is it enough to prevent a conservative backlash against us?

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When I was your age I never imagined what life for me at 50 would be like. I had no comprehension of the experiences that life would throw at me, which was just as well. Otherwise I might have preferred the white light of nothingness. But it remains in fact a good life, despite the threats we will always face from those who hate and fear us. There is only one way we can defeat their prejudice and that is to be ourselves, honestly and visibly.

I write this to you, X and Y, in the hope that the history of our struggle for liberation will be known and remembered by at least some of those who come after. It is up to you, the children of the Australian social revolution, to decide where you go from here. But perhaps some of this will go with you, much as sons sometimes learn something from their fathers.

Meeting you was important to me because it gave me some sign that my life had some significance, that there were slow almost imperceptible changes happening because people like me had simply continued to be what we were. We had made ourselves visible and continued to assert we had a place in the world. Now you must find yours. I wish you peace and understanding on your journey through life together.

I said to Mongo before I began writing this: “I want to write something for those boys.”

“A legacy for your children?” he asked as he sipped his cappuccino.

And he had it right again. It is not much but it’s all I have and I give it to you with love.

Author Bio

Jeremy Fisher has been published extensively and has considerable experience as a writer and publishing professional, working as editor, publisher and manager. He worked in rights management and was Executive Director of the Australian Society of Authors before moving to academia.. Jeremy Fisher teaches writing practice and theory in varieties of genres. Jeremy’s latest book is the novel *Music from another Country* (Fat Frog, 2009). More recently, he has short stories in the collections *Fear Factor: Terror Incognito* (Picador, 2010) and *Catching On* (Gay eBooks 2010).

Blog: <http://drjeremyfisher.blogspot.com/>

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Endnotes

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