

# BEYOND 'THAT'S SO GAY'

## A National Challenging Homophobia Tour

# LGBT Postcards from the Edge



## TOUR WEEK THIRTY-FIVE & SIX, TASMANIA OPTING IN OR OUT: MARILYN MUNROE WHISPERS AND COMING A LONG WAY...

*"Oh...You're even going to Tasmania?..."*

This was by far the most common response when people across Australia heard that I was taking the Beyond 'That's So Gay' national challenging homophobia tour to Tasmania. It was often delivered with a chuckle.

For most it seems a throwaway line. Such a throw away comment is something I've been very aware of, given my own history with Tasmania since 2000. It helps contribute to Tasmanians being wary of the mainland and feeling left out.



Yet leaving Tasmania out would have meant leaving out a large chunk of recent Australian lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) progress. This progress has surprised many, given that Tasmania has been ranked alongside parts of rural Queensland as the most homophobic when surveying attitudes.

When I was first volunteering for a gay and lesbian youth support project in Geelong in mid 1990s (see Geelong blog) I first became aware of the gay law reform campaign in Tasmania, and one name in particular: LGBT activist Rodney Croome. A few years later Rodney would be spending his Australia Day (2000) like I was: working. Rodney was in Geelong interviewing me for Outlink (see Mt Gambier blog) and to assess my suitability to be on the inaugural Management Committee.

Rodney's and my friendship grew from a trip to Tasmania in late 2000 where we saw all parts of his home state. I myself was most interested in the north-west, given it's history, explained for this blog by Rodney Croome himself.

***"The idea for Outlink was hatched by then Human Rights Commissioner, Chris Sidoti, after he launched the Working It Out [WIO] report, a needs analysis for young LGBT people on Tasmania's North West [NW] Coast, in Ulverstone in 1998. Ulverstone was the site of some of the worst homophobia during the long and bitter gay law reform campaign of the 1990s. The NW Coast had also seen some tragic gay youth suicides as a result of that homophobia. I was intimately involved in the gay law reform campaign and in putting together the WIO report. As a result I was dedicated to the idea that young LGBT people should be free to live in and contribute to the rural and regional communities they grow up in. For all these reasons I guess it made sense for Chris to ask me to head Outlink."***

**[More of Rodney's Outlink to Beyond 'That's So Gay' reflections will be available from the final, Week 38, blog.]**

Rodney and I took in Devonport, Penguin, Burnie, as well as Strahan, and it's less visited cousins, Queenstown – with it's fascinating museum and unforgiving football oval of stones rather than grass or even dirt! - and Rosebery.

One place I didn't go to was Smithton. I knew Smithton well given my friendship with Nairn Walker (see Broken Hill blog) who I'd met at the Johnson & Johnson New Leaders Forum in 1998 (see Canberra blog). Nairn had made a name for herself and set-up solid foundations for her role as international training expert whilst working in a student welfare role. Smithton is the kind of place that, when mentioned, elicits a host of pre-judgment.

Whilst in Tasmania I managed to speak to "Neil", a young man who was in Smithton until recently.

*"I grew up on a farm just outside of Smithton...Being gay growing up in Tasmania, it's not a very open minded place...There's a really masculine and feminine way to be and nowhere in between...There's no grey area..."*

Neil didn't really feel like he fit in with Smithton's idea of the norm.

*"I didn't fit with the norm, I never have...As a young child I was smart, which was never really looked upon favourably by my peers, and I wasn't a great footy player...Because I was so small...I was better at individual sports than team sports...And I got teased a lot to be honest, about being gay...I didn't really know what it meant..."*

I asked Neil if that really was the case.



*"OK I knew what it meant, but not what it meant for me..."*

Yet Neil doesn't identify as gay, more it identifies him best.

*"I can have sex with men or women, but it's about who I fall in love with...So therefore I would identify as a gay man..."*

Adopted from another country by his family, Neil grew up being one of the few people in Smithton who was not Caucasian. I asked if racism went hand in hand with homophobia. Perhaps his family made a difference.

*"My parents are very well known...They come from quite good families, so everyone kind of knows...So they know I was adopted and my story...So it was never really an issue...There was one girl in Grade One who made me cry...She called me something like a f\*cking black abo...I couldn't understand why she said that...'But I'm not Aboriginal?'..."*



Growing up, Neil felt he was in a very religious, heterosexual world.

*"Everyone went to church...They did the whole thing that everyone was expected to do down there which is to get married and have kids..."*

After years of struggling, Neil came out to his family.

*"I obviously fought with it for a long time...I used to cry about it a lot and ask, 'Why?'...I told them I was gay, hung up and then I wouldn't answer their calls for a week, which was big...[Note: if Neil doesn't*



*talk to his parents everyday on the phone they get very anxious]... [Mum] didn't agree with it, because my dad's [in the church] but said, 'I love you anyway'...[Dad] was like, 'That's cool, we still love you'... My dad's really groovy..."*

Coming out to his church friends was different.

*"They all pretty much disowned me...I tried so many times...The amount of tears that I shed over such a ridiculous thing, which was it was me...And now I say, 'Why wouldn't God love me if this is who I am?'...[The thing that got to me most] was more because I was so open, raw and honest to these people, and I was punished for being honest...That hurt more than anything and to be honest that's why I left the church...Nothing to do with the fact that I was gay..."*

This has coloured Neil's view of the church.

*"I find the church to be one of the most political places I've ever seen...I'm not saying that negatively, it's more factual....I mean people pretend that everything's perfect when it's not..."*

Telling his university friends helped Neil.

*"When I told my friend [Ernie] he said I was camp as a row of tents and he didn't care and that he loved me...."*

Yet ultimately Neil needed to get away from Smithton, not that he doesn't go home and sometimes go to church.

*"If I do go to church it's with my parents, with my granddad because they asked me...And I don't feel like I'm going to be struck by lightning when I go inside..."*

Neil might finally be approaching the place he has sought most.

*"It's been a long process to be honest...But now it's like, it's me...I'm happy with who I am...There's no internal fight anymore..."*

At a recent event in Sydney, Neil thought about his new world, far away from Smithton.

*"I was dancing and there were these hot guys dancing next to me and they were like everyone else, looking al straight and hot...Then, the event stopped, they turned to each other and just started kissing...It was one of the hottest things I've ever seen...No-one batted an eyelid and they were in their own little world...That made me go, 'That's the part of the world that I want to be a part of'..."*

Now Neil hopes for the simple things.





*"I want to be loved...It's white picket fence, it's finding a man who'll love me for me being me...And hopefully bring children into the world...I'm a lover not a fighter...[laughs]..."*

Whilst Neil has gone from strength to strength, sadly many young men like him in Tasmania's north west don't. In Ulverstone I spoke to State Greens Education Spokesperson, Paul O'Halloran.

*"In Tasmania there are 17 suicides per 100,000 population, and the national average is 8...Obviously there are a lot of young people not feeling OK with who they are..."*

For that reason, statewide peak LGBT support organisation, Working It Out ([www.workingitout.org.au](http://www.workingitout.org.au)) has a clear strategy for Tasmania's northern parts according to "Magda".

[Hear "Magda's" story at  
<http://www.abc.net.au/rural/telegraph/content/2010/s3062365.htm>  
I myself would head in to the ABC in Launceston for two separate radio interviews. Hear my ABC Bush Telegraph interview that follows on from "Magda's story at  
<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/bushtelegraph/stories/2010/3062366.htm>]

*"It's to create safe spaces..."*

This has included taking TasPride events to less populated parts and more recently regular discussion groups.

*"Some of my clients identified a need for some kind of support and discussion groups..."*

Working It Out head, "Deidre" sees the group's importance for limited resources.

*"The glory of the discussion groups is that they fill the need for support without needing one-to-one support...The majority of people who come to us don't need counseling, they just need affirmation..."*

The northern parts of Tasmania just might be improving according to Deidre.



*"I think that the North Coast has come a long way...It's got a ways to go, there's still people hiding, but a big percentage of people are now coming out..."*

"Tony" from the Tasmanian Council on AIDS, Hepatitis and Related Diseases (TasCAHRD, [www.tascahrd.org.au/](http://www.tascahrd.org.au/)) sees differences.

*"The acceptance of us going to places like Burnie and the West Coast within local government has changed...We're presuming that it's quite a shift..."*

Part of the reason for this shift could be a change in language.

*"We've changed to 'man2man' instead of 'Gay Men's Project'... Since we've done that the interaction with the project has increased, particularly with men who don't identify as gay...It's about access for men in rural areas..."*

However there is one indicator in northern Tasmania that is indicative of how life can vary across the small island state. Magda explains.

*"The people who are coming out in the North West are 30 years older than [LGBT people] in Launceston...The gay men move out or they hid...We still have people that are the only gay in the village..."*

In Launceston, "Heath" came out at 17, but not through choice.

*"Mum walked in on me and my [then] boyfriend having sex...She didn't talk to me for a year after that...But now she's a lot better..."*

Heath is not so interested in going to any support groups, even though he now qualifies for both LGBT young people's and adult groups.

*"Now there is a group for the young ones who are like coming out and sorting it all out...There is another group that meets and will go to like a venue, like the Casino at the Tonic Bar and sit around and talk..."*

There was even a local LGBT night for a time.

*"We used to have a place that had gay nights on a Friday night, and that was packed...There's actually quite a big gay and lesbian population in Launceston...Yeah it was mixed...But the owners basically ran it into the ground..."*

Heath prefers to go out locally with his friends. Similarly local hairdresser "Drew", who describes himself as "camp", goes out with all of his female friends. He feels safe thanks to their boyfriends.

*"It's not scary in Launceston...I'm there on the dancefloor with all my fag hags...And all their big macho boyfriends stand at the bar..."*



*mean, they wouldn't get on the dancefloor for anyone...But they tell me, 'Don't worry, we've got your back'..."*

Not that Drew can't handle himself. Recently at an engagement party outside of Launceston at a football club, he had to deal with a man who seemed to have a problem.

*"I was there with [a female friend]...This guy kept looking at me and finally he came up and said, 'Are you gay?'...Just his tone, it was really low...'Are you gay?'...I said, 'Yes, are you?'...He then said, 'I don't like fags. I'm not one but my cousin is and he got married'...I said, 'Did you go to the wedding?'...'Yeah, it was f\*cking beautiful'...'Did your cousin wear a dress?'...'What do you mean?'...'Well there's always a bride and a groom'...'Nah, nah, my cousin's boyfriend wore one'...He just kept asking personal, probing questions until I finally said, 'Are you trying to hit on me?'...'Nah, nah, I'm not'...I said [to my female friend], 'Quick, backs to the wall, he's trying to hit on us'..."*

Drew is often between Launceston and Devonport, where his partner lives and works. At a town in between, Deloraine, Drew recently went with his partner "Peter" for a meal.

*"There's a gay couple who own a hotel there, and we didn't go to that hotel, we went to the other one...And we walked in and there are two guys and a girl sitting at the bar...One said, 'Look at those dirty fucking faggots...They've got to be gay if ever I've seen 'em'...It was really horrible...A really nice restaurant if ever you're there...[Peter] was beside himself, he's never experienced that before...He wrote to the local papers about it...I said to him, 'I get this everyday!'..."*

Homophobia is something local branch of national youth mental health organisation, headspace, had a lot to say about (see Albany blog re headspace). As a key support for local young people in Launceston, staff here see the impact of homophobia on young people's lives.

Gathered for a cuppa and chocolate cake in headspace's tearoom I was reacquainted with "Russ" who I'd met a number of times over the last decade. I had



trained Russ when I was working across Victoria and Tasmania with Kids Help Line, as well as met him when I was training teachers and health professionals in the 'Pride & Prejudice' program ahead of a Tasmanian Education Department pilot project.

**[Thank-you to Launceston parking officers who gave me a parking fine for being 10 minutes over due to the success of this headspace visit and the staff's generous expansiveness, and their cake which contributed to my physical expansiveness.]**

Russ thinks there is a clear difference in young men and young women's experience.

*"I find the guys get a harder time within their peer group, their workplace...Why is [being gay] the worst thing 20 years on, even with the attitudes and beliefs have moved?..."*

It's a question that has been consistent across regional, rural and remote Australia. Despite any real or perceived "progress", being thought to be gay is still the worst possible thing for boys and men across the country. And homophobia is still an everyday possibility across the country. Yes, even in Sydney.

Counselor, "Roberta" also thinks young men experience homophobia differently.

*"Maybe the guys find it harder, mental health wise, because they probably get bullied more for being gay...Gay guys probably cop it worse than lesbians..."*

Another counselor "Judy" sees it affecting not just LGBT young people.

*"I've certainly had 13-14 year olds who don't identify as gay where other kids have called them gay or faggot and they've been extremely stressed by that...One young man had a group of older guys come up behind him and [fake hump] him..."*

Russ reflected on signs that things might have improved, wondering about public displays of same sex affection.

*"I'm thinking even through the [Launceston] mall...I can't recall seeing a same sex [male] couple holding hands through the mall..."*

Roberta adds in.

*"I've seen girls, but you think, 'Are they friends?'..."*

A young man that has seen Roberta was having issues with going out





in public, even without a partner, until recently.

*“One young guy had anxiety from walking down the street during the day because he thought people were looking and staring at him [because he was gay]...The only time he felt safe and confident was at night with his friends...He was one of the ones who had the response of no contact with family members for 3 years [after coming out as gay]...”*

Judy sees a pattern of family rejection locally.

*“It’s the family reactions...I’ve had some guys who have had some depression...They’ve had really negative reactions from family members, like not talking to them for 2 years...That’s a really severe reaction and that’s probably more the trend...”*

Recently there have been young men receiving counseling where sexual identity has come up as an issue. Roberta recalls one.

*“He thought I was there to tell him if he was gay or not...I said to him, ‘That’s OK, if you want to talk about it, it’s fine’...”*



Judy recalls how homophobia during a session led to bigger questions for another. Her own gentle challenging of homophobia might have started a road to a positive outcome.



*"I had a guy saying in a session that being gay was wrong...I said, 'I don't think there's anything wrong with it'...Now he's opted to see another counselor to sort through sexuality stuff...He was involved with a church and stuff and was very fired up about it..."*

Russ sees homophobia's overall impact on LGBT young people locally but sees young women as presenting with substance use issues.

*"[LGBT young people] are faring worse, because if you look at the data they are still overrepresented...Mental health, self-harming behaviours, sexual health...I'd find the girls are more involved with substance use..."*

Seated over a cuppa with headspace staff I asked about their connection with Working It Out. Judy believes these ties could be strengthened, but to be fair she missed an introductory session with Working It Out that happened in recent years.

*"Personally I don't know about services, like Working It Out...If I find a person has a particular set of issues that's when I'd be tending to know about the service..."*

All staff present reflected that they would like to know more, and to find out how to correct misconceptions of young LGBT people.

*"They feel like they have to have it worked out before they walk in the [Working It Out] door..."*

What headspace staff expressed was not very different to what I've heard across regional, rural and remote Australia: they are not clear about when to refer young people to LGBT services nor are they clear on what they exactly do.

Clarifying what they do and clearing up misconceptions is something Working It Out are working to address. Deidre is eager to be clear.

*"Working It Out targets people who are negotiating their gender and sexual diversity..."*

In other words, they service those people who are "working it out". Magda is also seeing an increase in training from services like headspace. The model to respond is a simple one.

*"We give them rainbow stickers, we provide posters and we work through an audit...It's really up to them..."*

Given that, like every other LGBT service and project across Australia, Working It Out is overcapacity, Deidre is mindful of services referring inappropriately.

*"[Services] find out that a client is gay and because they've run out of petrol they call [us]..."*



More recently Working It Out has been had more gender diverse people accessing their service than those questioning their sexual identity. Deidre makes an interesting observation about the problems they face.

*"It's invariably the homophobia that is the fear that impacts on transgender and intersex clients...It's funny because a lot of the time we hear about how different we are..."*

Not that Working It Out thinks it has gender diversity all worked out.

*"That inclusiveness is hard..."*



According to Tasmanian transgender advocate, Martine Delaney, inclusiveness is tough, partly due to numbers and specificity.

*"In Tasmania services are bound to be an almost generic LGBT service because the numbers [of LGBT people] aren't there...It's not being negative about [Tasmanian LGBT services]...Most trans folk end up feeling like, 'Oh, they can't offer me very much'...It's not about getting inclusive, it's that they don't get it...[For trans folk] it's really good to talk to somebody who understands...The reality is that trans stuff is so different to anything else... It really doesn't matter how thoughtful, empathetic, intelligent and sensitive someone is...Most people just don't get it really...They think they do, they get their head around some it, but ultimately they don't get it...I feel anger and disappointment that there [is no trans-specific service] because of the numbers, unless we can increase the number of trans folk in Tasmania..."*

Transgender folk in Tasmania are expected to go to sexual health services for support.



*"The only option is to go to a sexual health clinic, and it's often not about sexual health..."*

Martine herself has felt restrained by the expectations of some organisations that have supported her, one example being her speech therapy.

*"I've had speech therapy...I learnt to talk in a Marilyn Munroe whisper, but I f\*cking refuse to use it..."*

This causes everyday challenges. Recently an insurance company telephone call centre operator didn't believe Martine was Martine.

*"They refused to talk to me about my [insurance] policy because it said I was Ms Delaney and they thought they were talking to a bloke..."*

Yet Martine is doing something that most other trans folk don't do: remaining visible.

*"Most trannies just want to transition and dispppear into the woodwork and live their lives...Very few trannies want to stand up and be noticed..."*

This trend is something that was covered in my Brisbane, Gold Coast and Canberra blogs.

For this reason Martine has deliberately become "Martine The Trannie" because she wants to make a difference and be a voice.

*"It's a deliberate choice...I'm a media slut basically..."*

An example of Martine's media exploits can be seen here:  
[www.themercury.com.au/article/2009/08/30/94181\\_tasmania-news.html](http://www.themercury.com.au/article/2009/08/30/94181_tasmania-news.html)

When Martine was selected to play soccer for the Tasmanian women's soccer team she needed to be open and OK with media intrusion.

*"At times it drives you a little batty and it's a pain in the arse but I have a strong belief that a lot of what happens in your life is because of your actions, so there's no point getting p\*ssed off about that..."*

That kind of perspective might help when Martine, her same-sex partner and daughter wake up to graffiti and broken glass in, on and around their family home.

Martine believes that her voice is being joined by more and more trans folk as time goes by.

*"It's a growing tension...Trans folk around the country are becoming more vocal...How do we get some input into policymaking without riding on the back of LGBT stuff?...I must admit I go get a little concerned for bisexual, trans and intersex folk..."*

Too often B, T and I get left behind.

"Even though they start off with LGBTI, they rapidly break down into the needs of gays and lesbians..."





Not that Martine is limited to just transgender advocacy. She has been pivotal in ensuring progress in challenging homophobia programs in Tasmanian schools over the years, most notably heading Working It Out during times when Pride & Prejudice was being evaluated for a statewide rollout by the Tasmanian Education Department.

One of the first Tasmanian teachers to be trained by me in Pride & Prejudice facilitation was “Lee”. Now a primary school teacher, Lee started her career as a secondary school teacher.

Noticing that the Australian Education Union (AEU) did not have any LGBT policy, Lee and two colleagues headed to an AEU branch meeting in Ulverstone. Presenting to an AEU General Meeting they proposed a bill.

*“It was the first ever bill that was passed unanimously...We had to talk to a room full of men in their 40s and 50s, but we got a great response...We then thought, ‘There’s gotta be people like us who want to get together...”*

And so the idea of PinkDesk was born. Receiving a two-week AEU scholarship, the Anna Stewart Memorial Project, Lee completed the basic foundations of the PinkDesk website.

*“It quickly became apparent, however, that simply delivering a GLBT policy to schools wasn’t going to magically fix the homophobia many teachers and students were silently experiencing. Pink Desk was formed by four of the original consultative group members (with the exceptional support of Roz Madsen) to begin the difficult task of educating principals, teachers, parents, students and the wider school community about the importance of equality and the acceptance of diversity within the public education workplace – staff and student equality and diversity. Pink Desk is committed to providing support and resources to GLBTI teachers, parents and students. We encourage all teachers to browse our resources and teacher programs.”*



PinkDesk website ([www.aeutas.org.au/PinkDesk.aspx](http://www.aeutas.org.au/PinkDesk.aspx))

For a time Lee was invited onto the Tasmanian Department of Education’s GLBTI Reference Group. Immediately she saw some issues.

*“There were no teachers on [the reference group]...They were all focused on this publication [Talking Out]...None of it was informed by teachers...”*



*They all had the right idea with what they wanted to happen but they had no idea with what was going on in schools...They had the best intentions with that, but nobody read it..."*

**[Talking Out example:**

**[http://www.education.tas.gov.au/school/health/inclusive/gender/support/talking\\_out\\_newsletter/talkingout2.pdf](http://www.education.tas.gov.au/school/health/inclusive/gender/support/talking_out_newsletter/talkingout2.pdf)**]

The feedback that Lee received was that part of the problem was who was getting Talking Out. At first it was going to school principals.

*"You can imagine as a principal you get so much shit that you just don't read it...So they spent so much time and money on it..."*

One thing Lee and others argued was to send it to student welfare and other teachers. This and the lack of teacher representation on the GLBTI Reference Group caused frustration.

*"People started saying, 'Well they don't really listen to what we have to say anyway'...I got frustrated, and others fed back that they didn't feel like they had a voice...People asked, 'Where is the teacher representation?'..."*

Unfortunately the GLBTI Reference Group folded, however even that was not communicated and left teachers feeling frustrated.

*"All of a sudden it just stopped...It all got really messy and nobody kind of knew what was going on..."*

Listening to Lee's experience would be informative for any of us, given her own experience of coming out in a rural Tasmanian school successfully.

Knowledge and confidence certainly play a part.

*"I guess I'm fairly lucky that I haven't had a bad experience...I'm fairly aware of my rights in the education department...I know that if someone on the staff were to discriminate against me that I have rights and I know the channels to go through...I am the kind of person who is confident and I don't ever let people know that I'm not..."*

With this as the foundation, Lee came out.

*"I found it easier to be open with kids in high school...In my teaching style I am fairly open in general...My home life is a big part of who I am...Yes they may have a reaction [at first] to that, but I just continue on [teaching], let them deal with that and then they move on...And I've never been disappointed by that...More often than not there will be kids who say, 'Oh my aunty is gay, or my friend is gay'..."*

If anything, staff were more shocked by her approach than students.

*"I think some of them, the staff that is, were shocked by [my being out]... [Students] would say things like, 'You fat lesbian' and I'd say, 'Hey, I'm not fat'..."*



Homophobia is just as rampant as anywhere else in Australia.

*"It's commonplace... 'That chair's gay' and all that stuff..."*



Letting students know that her sexual identity is not something that can be used as a weapon against her was key.

*"One student spray painted [something homophobic about Lee] on the side of the gym...[All the teachers] said, 'Don't go out there and look'...Well I made sure everyone knew I was out there having a look and that they knew I wasn't affected...I didn't have a reaction, but the kids did..."*

The result was that the majority of students rallied around Lee and made it unacceptable for other students to target her.

*"Because I was out at my school and supported by the parents, the kids then look at [any homophobic student] and they know it's not OK and they know why..."*

And Lee was also effective in making things happen. At one stage a pilot of 'Pride & Prejudice', my challenging homophobia education package for schools, was to be implemented with Working It Out's co-facilitation at Lee's school. Yet again she felt there was a lack of consultation when letting parents know that the pilot was going ahead.

*"Without asking me...They went with an 'opt in' strategy rather than an 'opt out' strategy..."*

The thinking goes is that notes are sent home to parents informing them that a program is taking place. An 'Opt In' strategy asks parents to send back a note saying they agree that their child can attend. An 'Opt Out' strategy asks parents to send back a note if they don't want their child to





attend. Most school wisdom suggests that parents are more unlikely to send notes back, so apathy means that most parents won't be motivated to send a note back to disallow their child attending. Therefore, an 'Opt In' strategy might see parents here are supportive of a program, yet they don't get around to sending a note home.

*"Parents can't be arsed filling them out to bring them back..."*

Some parent resistance meant that Pride & Prejudice did not go ahead with Working It Out's support. Or did it?

*"I ended up running [Pride & Prejudice later] in my health class..."*

Coming out in the school only caused Lee to second guess herself when students began to come out.

*"Word spread very quickly and I had respect as a teacher so when kids came out I was thinking, 'Sh\*t, are the community going to think that I'm turning kids gay'...But it wasn't like that...They didn't...They were actually really happy that they had an 'expert' in the community...[laughs]..."*

The school even became overly paranoid about discriminating.

*"They were asking about same sex physical contact [between students] and I asked, 'Well what would you do if it was a boy and a girl?' Your policy says it's none between boys and girls so it's the same'...They were actually trying to go the other way because they were worried..."*

Interestingly Lee wasn't concerned in being in a rural school.

*"Maybe I was a bit naïve in that respect because I didn't see it as any different to being in a city school..."*

Now Lee is making a transition to a primary school setting.





*"It's different in a primary school because they think, there's almost this pedophilic thing, particularly with men... Probably because it's a more hands on role [than with high school]... You have kids cuddling you, you take them to the changerooms when they go swimming... You're the primary carer for the day as opposed to just one hour a day..."*

**[In my book, *Beyond 'That's So Gay': Challenging homophobia in Australian schools*, I discuss 'paedophile paranoia' in the context of interactions with male students at an all-boys Catholic school:**

**"The story goes that as a result of this unspoken 'paedophile paranoia', gay men do not fully participate in education, policing themselves in all that they do. As gay men we doubt our capabilities and our actions, assuming that we will be thought to be something we are not. This second-guessing is something that we MUST lay to rest in ourselves before we can fully participate in significantly altering the educational landscape. This distancing is clearly problematic."]**

Being pregnant and then becoming a mother was more helpful for Lee in coming out to her primary school students than it was for her partner.

*"Interestingly [her] kids know she is in a same-sex relationship, but they just don't understand it... They know [she] is a mum, but they don't understand that I had the baby... They hate homosexuals because that's what their parents tell them and she doesn't know how to address that in her classroom without getting too much attention herself... Whereas it's easier for me because I had the baby they ask me about it... Although they still ask about the dad..."*

Lee reflects on her own experiences versus those of her teacher partner.

*"She was austracised from the word go, so she has those really horrible situations to think about... But I don't have that, I haven't been shaped by those earlier experiences... [At her new school] she hasn't had a bad experience in a few years, but she's waiting for one..."*

Lee believes it could be time for things to progress in Tasmania.

*"I think the climate now is ready for it... A couple of years makes a difference... It's a subject that's talked about..."*

One school where "it" is being talked about is The Friends School in Hobart. I was invited by "Uma", a teacher who had found out about me through her sister, who subsequently found out about me through Facebook. Wondering towards the school's reception possibly looking a little bit lost, Uma jumped seemingly out of nowhere.

*"Daniel!... That's the beauty of Facebook, I knew your face..."*

I chuckled, because no matter how many times it has happened this year, it still surprises me.

Talking with Uma we moved to a classroom where we were quickly joined by a Year 11 and 12 Philosophy class, some other interested students and another teacher. Uma had announced my visit to the entire senior school.



*"I got up and told all the Year 11s and 12s and some of the jock group started and I just looked at them [gestures 'What the?'] and asked, 'What's the problem guys?'..."*

I certainly felt many pairs of eyes on me as I was escorted through crowds of students to a classroom, then again as I walked out of the classroom and out to reception. Having felt the "That's him, that's the gay guy/poof/fag/got" vibe before, many of the students were aware of what was going to take place in that classroom. Still, two young men chose independently to come and contributed well.

*"It's great because they didn't have to come...They're such beautiful boys..."*

Uma told a story later about how some students thought she might be gay due to her close friendship with another female teacher.

*"They saw me hugging her and assumed we were gay because we were affectionate..."*

Uma only found out when some of her students told of how they put the situation "straight".

*"They heard some students saying that we were gay and they said, 'Them? No they're not. They're OK with it, but they're not'..."*



After talking about my tour and telling a few stories I asked about student experiences of homophobic language, such as 'That's so gay', and how they found teachers handled it. Or not.



*"[Uma]: [All teachers] say something when they hear it...  
[Young man]: I've never heard a teacher say anything...  
[Uma]: Well [young man's name] you have not been in one of my classes at the time!...  
[Young man]: Yeah but that's you...We all know you would..."*

Uma tells stories of how she has to remind some of her students that same sex attracted young people are still experiencing homophobia. Yet the young people I gathered with were aware that homophobia could be a problem for LGBT young people.

After the students had left the classroom, teacher "Fleur" was reflective.

*"[Fleur]: I've been here 15 years and I haven't known of a student to come out...We're supposed to be good as a school, and we are, but not on this issue..."*

*[Uma]: Maybe when [the tour] is over we could get you to come back and work with the students?...*

*Daniel: Well I think an even more important conversation is the one you can have with staff so that you all can be having these conversations with your students...*

*[Fleur]: I was thinking the staff too...I'm the [professional development] coordinator, but I wasn't hear for that...I'm lucky that I have a beautiful godson who is one of the most successful real estate agents in [Tasmanian town]..."*

