

Inclusion

All the colours of the rainbow

A COTA SA initiative is helping to support older LGBTQI+ South Australians

Recent legislation has helped to improve the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex and asexual people but there is still some way to go.

"Our older community is more likely to be single and childless, they often have experienced more poverty, unemployment and insecure work, they may hide their sexuality or gender from providers when accessing services and delay seeking help, and they feel invisible," says Jackie Wurm, project officer at COTA SA Rainbow hub. "Some go back into the closet when they feel more vulnerable."

COTA SA's Rainbow Hub offers programs, services, events and activities for LGBTI people over the age of 50. A popular event is the monthly lunch which brings people together across the state. "It's a good place to connect," Wurm says.

Other services include a Silver Rainbow program which offers LGBTI aged care awareness training, while Rainbow Horizons, supported by the Office for Ageing Well, creates greater cross-generational support in relation to end-of-life-planning, care and dying.

cotasa.org.au/rainbowhub

When the first Gay Pride march took to the streets of Adelaide in September 1973,

Will Sergeant was there – the man behind the "I" in "pride". When the first Gay Mardi Gras was held in Sydney in 1978, he was there, too. Fifty years on, Sergeant is still a strong voice for gay rights. The 2021 South Australian Historian of the Year's alter ego Dr Gertrude Glossip holds regular tours as part of South Australia's annual History and Feast festivals, educating and entertaining locals and visitors with tales of the state's gay history.

Sergeant's own history will resonate with many older LGBTQI+ community members. Brought up in rural South Australia in the 1950s and '60s, the flamboyant, artistic teen was forced to hide his true self. "I was bad at sports so I was teased," he recalls. "It certainly had its challenges. Even though I was flamboyant and effeminate, I really repressed those gay feelings in my teen years. I kept it right down inside."

In his early 20s and living in Adelaide, this repression even led Sergeant to consider conversion therapy – in other words, electric shock treatment. "I thought, 'I've got to be cured of this,'" he says. "But then I had the realisation – accept who you are. I started coming out to family, friends and work colleagues."

A brave move, given this was around the time of the death of George Duncan, a gay law lecturer at The University of Adelaide who drowned in 1972 after being attacked and thrown into the River Torrens. But it was this horrific event that became the watershed moment in the story



of gay law reform in Australia – and helped give creation to Dr Gertrude Glossip. As gay protesters and advocates began to find their voice, Sergeant found his inner drag. "I've always liked a bit of dress up but I've never been a showgirl or drag queen," he says. "With gay liberation, we did have a bit of fun with dress and gender. Sometimes we'd really frock up for fun and do a kind of 'gender confusion' as we call it – but not in that stylised, drag queen way."

In 1993, Dr Gertrude Glossip was born. "It will be my 30th anniversary this year so I really will be a pearly queen," she says, taking over the interview. "Ian Purcell, who was a strong advocate for the rainbow community, and I originally created Mrs Gertrude Glossip, the farmer's wife who was interested in community history and archaeology. When Feast started in 1997, we decided to have a gay history walk and Gertrude was the logical person to lead the tour."

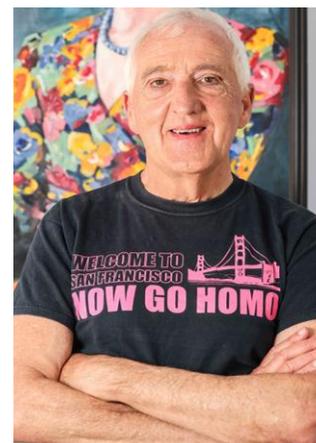
"Gertrude abandoned her husband and rural roots and came to town. We decided if

she was a doctor she'd have a bit more gravitas so we made her PhD of formal drapery from Curtin University, whose motto is 'Decorate while you educate, paint the lily, add another hue onto the rainbow'. It evolved from there."

Today, Dr Glossip continues to live that motto in her popular history tours. "People like to be entertained so I always make it a performative aspect, almost theatre sometimes. While visitors are there to learn and be enlightened or shocked or appalled, they also want to be entertained and captured by the moment."

In 2021, Dr Glossip released Queen of the Walk, a compilation of eight history tours. "It captures 25 seasons of history walks," she says. "I'm really glad we've done it and it's a permanent record of some of the stories from Adelaide's rainbow history."

Queen of the Walk is available from all good bookstores



Main picture: Dr Gertrude Glossip is an iconic part of the state's annual Feast and History festivals. Top: Will Sergeant holds the letter "I" at the 1973 Gay Pride march in Adelaide. Above: Sergeant was named 2021 South Australian Historian of the Year.



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