There Is No Happy Ending
To This Story

Arthur Veno

Called by the Premier of South Australia a ‘bikie apologist’ and a ‘bikie spin doctor’ as well as a ‘dog and traitor’ by some bikies, Professor Arthur Veno stands as a person who will tell you exactly what he thinks. His 30 years of working with bikies and police in the United States and Australia has led him to be one of the most colourful and controversial media figures on bikie culture in the world. He has written The Brotherhoods on bikie culture, and Biker Chicks, which probes the dark women’s side of outlaw motorcycle gangs.

The brilliant afternoon sun warmed the wooden bench upon which I sat at the clubhouse of the Adelaide chapter of the Gypsy Jokers Motorcycle Club. My feet didn’t reach the ground and I swung my legs like a frightened primary school child sitting in an oversized chair waiting to see the principal. My guts were in knots. The former president of the club was inside attempting to broker our way out of the problems for which he and I had been summoned to this meeting. Steve and all his club brothers had gone in behind the two massive steel doors to the entry of the clubhouse. I alone remained on the bench. The four-metre high walls of the perimeter of the clubhouse were made of railway sleepers and the Noms (men who are yet to be accepted as full members of the club), walked around the top of the fence monitoring the streets outside. Occasionally one would make a noise like a bird whistle or other sound as a heads-up to the other Noms about an approaching vehicle or pedestrian.

The warmth of the sun and my wait provided an opportunity to reflect on how things had come to this point. My mind drifted back to a few years earlier. Tensions in South Australia between bikies and the government had been blasted across the media with the first engagement of the Tactical Response Group (TRG) of the South Australian Police, commonly known as SAPOL. The event was the annual run of the Gypsy Jokers in January 2001; their destination was the tiny seaside
hamlet of Beachport located near the Victorian border. For reasons unknown, the newly formed TRG had arrived and an all-out battle occurred between the TRG and the Gypsy Jokers. The TRG came out losers by any standard. Their commander’s jaw was broken and his hat taken from him and worn during the remainder of the brawl by Steve ‘Horrible’ Williams. Following the ‘battle at Beachport’ Williams had returned to Adelaide and turned himself in to police after learning he had been charged with assault and affray. He was the only person charged for his activities in Beachport. In typical bikie fashion, the Jokers demonstrated their solid support for a brother and elected Williams as president. The first issue on his agenda was to manage the fall-out from Beachport.

My first book on outlaw motorcycle clubs, entitled *The Brotherhoods,* had established my bikie credibility. I had received national and state awards for prevention of violence in outlaw motorcycle club-related situations. When Williams contacted me for assistance in dealing with the aftermath of Beachport, and having thoroughly investigated the situation, I agreed to help manage the emerging attack on the clubs by the state. It was an agreement which was to affect me personally for many years to come and took me deep into the outlaw motorcycle club culture. I was to be both challenged and changed by my experiences.

Previous intensive political work had taught me to take on a partner so I asked my long-time colleague and friend, Dr Julie Van den Eynde, to assist me in this venture. Dr Van den Eynde is as ‘straight’ as they come: devout Presbyterian, professional psychologist, academic, analyst and feminist. In other words, she possessed the qualities as an ‘outsider’ to keep me focused and on track during the years of immersion into the bikie world that I was about to undertake. Initially, I was based three days a fortnight in a five-star hotel in Adelaide. In addition to being a swanky place to stay, the hotel was in an excellent location, as it was close to Parliament House. Julie had her own room in the hotel which put her close at hand for work, while affording her privacy at the end of the day.

The first task was to develop Williams into a public spokesman for the Gypsy Jokers and other motorcycle clubs, which are commonly referred to as ‘motorcycle gangs’. He took to it like a duck to water. Two months into the project, the long-established bikie code of silence was well and truly gone. Williams and I would be on one of several phones making contact with mass media, police, parliamentarians, club members, sympathisers and the like. Dr Van den Eynde commented upon how he emulated me, carrying the same sort of briefcase, using tape recorders for note-taking, and pacing when speaking on the phone.

One memorable event occurred during an afternoon in late November when
I was at the hotel base. The mobile phone rang and it was Williams. He was calling me from Stormy’s, the most notorious brothel in Adelaide. Stormy Summers was a retired stripper who owned and managed the three-storey brothel, located in the heart of Adelaide’s entertainment district. Stormy’s was ground zero for Adelaide’s underworld. I was on the other phone speaking with a parliamentarian and asked him to hold on for a moment as I saw from the phone ID that it was Williams who was ringing me.

‘Hey, Arthur, I bought you an early Christmas present. There is a new blonde working at Stormy’s and I’ve booked you in for all night with her,’ he said anxiously, as if expecting me to rush right over in anticipation of whatever sweet delights were waiting there for me.

‘Umm, that’s great, Steve, but I’m tied up here for the rest of the day and I don’t think I can make it to Stormy’s,’ I replied.

The truth is that I am a monogamist. I am not interested in sex with women other than my life partner, Elizabeth, the mother of my children and love of my life. For me, the old adage, ‘It doesn’t matter where you get your appetite as long as you eat at home,’ holds true. So, I thought I had managed the situation well, as Williams took no offence and agreed the work at hand superseded a romp in the sack with a paid companion. Dr Van den Eynde and I had a chuckle about it. Then two hours later, while we were in a meeting with a political adviser from the Australian Democrats party, I got another call from Williams.

‘Hey, Arthur,’ he blurted, every bit as anxious as he had sounded during the previous call, ‘I solved your problem. I rented a room for the new blonde at your hotel. She is in Room 214. She will be waiting for you.’

This time, I knew I had to come clean. ‘Horrible, mate, I am just not into that kind of thing. I don’t mean to be disrespectful, but I just don’t do that,’ I said, hoping he truly wouldn’t be offended.

There was a stunned silence on the other end of the phone. Then Williams said, ‘Well, I’ll go over and keep her busy.’ He didn’t show up till I was having breakfast the next morning. I started to apologise about not accepting his Christmas present, but he just smiled and said, ‘No worries, Arthur. Mates do not fall out over a whore.’

As the project progressed we decided to open a hotline for South Australians who harboured complaints about the TRG, or indeed SAPOL. To do this, we required a person to take the calls and record the information. There was careful consideration by the Jokers as to who might be suitable. Many wives or girlfriends were capable, but all were ruled out by the likelihood of having to deal with
unsavoury calls. There was one woman, though, who fitted the bill. Her name
was Gina, a follower of the club, literally and figuratively speaking. Gina had
recently moved interstate to be associated with the Jokers. The publicity
surrounding the campaign we were on had reached out to her: she simply left
her family and grandchildren to be with the club. Williams and I arranged to
meet her at my hotel.

We were quietly working away, awaiting her arrival, when we received a call.
It was Shelly from the reception desk who informed us that a certain Gina was
in the lobby and wanted to come up and visit. A moment later we heard the
anticipated knocking on my door. What greeted my eyes was a woman in her late
40s wearing a modest outfit.

‘Hi, I’m Gina. I believe you’re expecting me,’ she said, flashing a charming
smile.

Gina was definitely attractive and presented as a pleasant and warm person.
I invited her into the room and offered her a chair. For the occasion, Williams
wore his Gypsy Jokers colours (leather vest displaying the club’s name, insignia
and region), which accented his heavily muscled and tattooed body. He raised
himself to his full 191 centimetre height and peered down at her. Talk about
intimidating! We began the interview, which started with Gina giving us a very
brief background.

‘My family thinks I am just a bikie slut. I guess, maybe I am. I can’t explain
why I left them to come here for a new life, but it was something calling me,’
Gina said.

I had met a few similar women who, like Gina, left the world of the ‘straights’
and became what is known in bikie culture as ‘Hang Arounds’, ‘Mamas’ or ‘Sweet
Butts’. Unlike Gina, Sweet Butts are normally there for the any-way-you-like-it
sex, adventure and drugs.2 They normally are not at all privy to club business so it
was a big step for me and the club to take Gina on as a volunteer for the hotline
duties.

‘How are you on telephone work?’ I inquired.

‘I have run sex phone lines and can handle anything said to me,’ she stated
proudly.

Williams wasn’t convinced. He asked her if she could keep club business to
herself and only report to us, meaning him and me. He posed the question with
a certain edge to it, which was enough to suggest that speaking to anyone else
would be unacceptable.

Gina, totally unflustered, got to her feet, hiked up her dress and pulled down
a side of her panties to reveal a 15-centimetre tattoo of a dagger which proclaimed ‘Property of GJMC Adelaide’. I was stunned. However, Williams said, ‘Hey, you’re supposed to get approval for that sort of thing.’ Despite her not following club protocol, we knew we had found our phone volunteer and one of the elders of the Jokers agreed to train her for the task.

As the project developed, all of us changed. For the club, they were somewhat uncomfortable with their ‘celebrity’ status. At the best of times, one finds bikie club or gang members to be secretive, sullen and difficult to approach. That is partly what the members want. However, in order to achieve the goals, the gang members had to put up with members of the public approaching them at venues like fish and chip shops saying, ‘Hey, you are the guys taking on the Premier. Good onya!’ By all measures, we were well ahead of the government on the all-important opinion polls. The newspapers were firmly onside and the government on the defensive.

Williams was well aware that he was a very likely target for assassination from any of several possible sources. In fact, he had arranged the construction of a large coffin made of super-heavy gauge steel. He placed his double bed inside the steel coffin and his girlfriend and he slept there. He openly referred to the bed as being for ‘the safest sex possible’—a line which was widely reported in the mass media and received with great humour, adding to the legend he was becoming.

Williams was a massive public figure in Adelaide by this time. He couldn’t go out of his dwellings without people coming up to him and shaking his hand. He even received fan mail from thoroughly middle-class Adelaidians who invited him to dinner and the like. He loved this attention and started to move away from the central club politics. He became increasingly involved in helping the underprivileged and was taking a serious run at the government about a well-established paedophile ring in Adelaide.

I too had changed. For example, I was formerly able to respect authority to a degree or two less than your average person. Although I was still able to maintain my other life, I now had no respect for any person who was in authority by virtue of their appointment or election and saw them as the ‘enemy’. Dr Van den Eynde, however, just did her job and managed to stay detached.

Drifting off down memory lane on the bench outside the clubhouse and recalling the events that led me there seemed to have made me even more nervous and I was sweating profusely. I could no longer sit still on the bench. I dragged myself to my feet and wandered over to a small graveyard which some club members had chosen for their final resting place. Thinking about the men interred there,
most of whom had died violently, didn’t do much for my spirits, but suddenly
the massive steel doors of the clubhouse swung open. Williams emerged in a state
of extreme duress. He and the current sergeant-at-arms of the club, Brownie,
shortly came to blows. No-one but Brownie could have possibly given Williams
a hiding and I could see a few others positioning themselves to help out Brownie.
Williams and Brownie were circling each other, shaking their heads saying, ‘Yeah?’
‘Yeah?’ and were looking for an opportunity to land a punch.

I knew Williams was tooled up and didn’t want to see a worst case scenario
evolve. I stepped between the two bikies and said to Williams, ‘It’s my turn now.
It won’t help to fight it out here. I think you should wait in the car for me and let
me carry on with the meeting I came here for.’ Steve’s hand was sweaty and he was
very focused on Brownie, but fortunately sane heads prevailed. Brownie and the
others agreed it was time for our meeting, leaving Steve to wait for me in the car.
I walked into the clubhouse and faced the assembled members. A single stool was
taken away from the bar and positioned to address the 30 or so faces comprising
the club. I was asked to sit on it. I said, ‘I think better on my feet.’ All approved.

The Jokers’ new president, whose club name was Kitty, said, ‘Arthur, if you
ever want to be able to visit any Gypsy Joker Clubhouse, you will not write about
Beachport, or the Gypsy Jokers.’ Much discussion followed, but I had got the
message—shut up or ship out. Williams, it seemed, was ‘out in bad standing’.

There is no happy end to this story, only one that evokes conspiracy theories
and questions what goes on behind the closed doors of the powers that be.
One day in April 2005, Williams was seen getting into a car for a meeting with
a senior member of SAPOL regarding the paedophile scandal. To all intents
and purposes, Williams never arrived at his destination and is still listed on
the official Australian Missing Persons List—presumed dead! Unopposed, the
South Australian government forged ahead with their campaign to eliminate
bikies in South Australia, culminating in the most draconian set of laws in
Australia, if not the world, in the form of the South Australian Serious and