

Dear Fabian, Mother full of grace, wisdom, kindness, courage and good cheer, qualities too few humans possess. I consider myself an exceptionally fortunate woman to have been able to call you a friend. I shall treasure your memory and the last few times we caught up. Leading us as usual with a joyful stigma canceling tune on your trusty accordion - this time during World Pride on a magical mystery, pride filled, bus tour, then sharing your good news that after 30 years of legal battles, you had won the legal right to share your ancestral homes on the Italian Island of Salina.

We also shared our dismay at our portrayal, the reimagined versions of us, the writers of the TV series In Our Blood, had created. I'd been portrayed typically, for my profession, as an illiterate slapper, Fabian as Mother Inferior had been portrayed in an even worse manner, doing unspeakable things with crucifixes in a sauna under the guise of AIDS Education. Fabian withdrew any previous support he had lent and let them know why. I pressed on critiquing the scripts. Getting to see it before it went to air, I was able to share with Fabian that much of our advocacy had paid off, and our 'characters' were closer to the reality of who we are and what we were doing at the time.

Mother turned the old love the sinner, hate the sin on its head and made an art of it. She loved all of us, every part of us - and for sex workers, for who we are, for the joy we give others and for the way we cared for our families and our community.

Pledging loyalty including through the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence to public service, social activism and spiritual enlightenment, Fabian was a pioneer for human, legal and religious rights of the queer kind, a true blue human rights defender to be able to be our authentic selves, standing by the most stigmatized and celebrating our achievements but also being there through tougher times. At special events and blessings - like Carols by Redlight for NUAA (NSW Users & AIDS Association) in Kings Cross - a particularly joyful event where Mother had written special hymns (see attached) for the occasion. One of them went something like "I saw 3 fits come sailing in..come sailing in...on Xmas Day in the Morning." Clearly an ode to the life saving benefits of harm reduction and needle exchange. Mother was very proud of our achievements in stopping the spread of HIV among people who used drugs and fighting for better treatment, as she was of our efforts in getting condoms into brothels and on to those reluctant male appendages.

Through all of these times, she was a kind of spiritual guide but Mother had an interest in this activity too, with a different kind of customer, encouraging (and demonstrating) the use of condoms with men who visited saunas. We shared a particularly unique type of health promotion in spaces never before envisaged.

When HIV arrived emboldening our haters, Mother was there, buoying us up and helping us survive those terrible times. In Her presence, I always felt a kind of peace one might expect to get in church or from a belief in a higher power neither of which were part of my life experiences or belief system. The solace Mother provided during those darkest days of HIV, the unconditional love, solidarity and empathy made Fabian and all of his manifestations an intrinsic part of our lives and our unique Australian response to HIV, helping to save and comfort many lives.

Not having a religious upbringing, I could have almost been converted by Fabian and came in later life to learn of one of my 'sisters' from antiquity/from the bible - Rahab, a Canaanite woman living and working in Jericho. The story goes that before the Israelites conquered Canaan, they sent a couple of men to spy on the land. They came upon Rahab's house, it says, for lodging, information and/or sex. Perhaps all three why not, what a perfect stop over! Rahab has been viewed variously as a model of hospitality, mercy, faith and repentance but with this last word I hear the words of Fabian ringing in my ears - no need for repentance, it is okay to be gay or for me and my kind, to be a sex worker.

Anyway, coming to an arrangement with these men, having saved their lives by hiding them, Rahab makes them swear an oath that they will not harm her and those she cared for. They hand her a scarlet ribbon or thread and tell her to tie it to the window and that on their return, the lives of all those in the house with her will be spared. And, so it came to pass, they were spared. The use today of the red umbrella as a global symbol of sex worker rights is a modern day equivalent of the red or scarlet thread.

In the early 80s I was desperately trying to divest myself of the last vestiges of guilt and shame I had been harboring - a kind of internalized whorephobia, not unlike internalized homophobia, I came upon the Sisters and Mother Inferior in particular with the battle cry for an end to stigmatic guilt through the promulgation of universal Joy. How very appropriate to my needs.

Like Rahab, I ran a kind of lodging house of information and sex - safe sex that is - a model of hospitality, mercy and faith (in humanity) and just around the corner was the then Sydney Mother House of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (later to be called the Order of Perpetual Indulgence OPI) .

In my 'lodging house' lived a DingoX his name was Ralph and he was the protector of all who lived and toiled under that roof but let him out on the street unsupervised he had a tendency to revert to his true nature. Unbeknown to me at the time, the Sisters and I both worshiped the dingo and clearly had much in common. For the Sisters, the scapegoating and vilification of the dingo following the disappearance of a child in a camping ground in the early 80s and its trial by media, like my unsupervised Ralph, the Sisters noted at the time "...doing no more than living true to its nature, in much the same way that members of the LGBTQI+ community living as their true selves and nature find themselves at times being scapegoated, stigmatized and vilified by some members of the wider community.." Thus was born the Holy Dingo as a spiritual icon and sacred totem of the OPI.

Back to my little house of joy. It was covered in ivy and the sisters, including Mother would appear some mornings with shears in hand and clip away at the ivy to make floral tributes bowing as they went in honor of the universal joy and freedom from stigma they believed emanated from the house. They were right and my very badly behaved crossdressing slave, against my wishes and behind my back, would some mornings be out the front of the house sweeping the street, hoping to be admired by passersby, and thought the Sisters were bowing to him. It made his day.

How could I not feel our purpose was special and revered and that our rights would one day be enshrined in law. That the time of secrets and lies and repression that Fabian had rejected for himself and helped others overcome was over - now for me to be my authentic self, be free and build confidence to one day come out, not of the closet, but of the brothel so to speak.

Finally, one night in a town hall out in the wilds of the inner west, dressed in a delicate scarlet petticoat and crown of thorns, with my then 8 year old son by my side, I entered the exalted place of a sainted sinner of the Order along with others including

St. David of the Bar and St. Don the Dauntless, as St. Julia Keeper of the red thread..how kind of fitting but how very special that Fabian saw it so.

Rest now dear Mother this world is a far better place for you having been part of it and I am a far better and happier person for having known you. Your legacy will live on.

St.Julia, keeper of the red thread.

Sharing this little piece of Queer history; just one of the late Fabian LoSchiavo aka Mother Inferior's loving and most creative mission for good as part of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence battle cry for the end of stigmatic guilt through the promulgation of universal joy. Standing by one of the most stigmatized groups in society.

