

## John Burbidge shares a coming out adventure with 'The Boatman'

26 Jul 2015 | Filed under Featured | Posted by admin



**John Burbidge's last book was the biography of gay local writer Gerald Glaskin; now he returns with a memoir of his own.**

'The Boatman' explores within a six-year time frame the sexual adventures in a coming-out process of the Perth-born writer. His job as a community development volunteer in India in the early 1980s gave him many an opportunity to discover his sexuality.

John Burbidge's writing is fluid and engaging and written with such honesty, rarely seen since *'Holding the Man'*.

The book details many encounters that take place in a variety of situations and places; bandstands, dark-lit parks, railway toilets, back of taxis, riding around Calcutta having a three-way in the back of a friend's car!

One of the more amusing stories was when he made love to young Indian man standing in a hot, crowded train. At first, I couldn't believe that would be possible so I read that page more than once and the way John describes that moment is simply hilarious.

The most frightening was the opening chapter when he was bashed up in Bombay park and also later in the book when he hailed a rickshaw looking for some hot late-night action, he got the wrong Urdu word for young male and was instead was taken to a brothel and given an 11 year old boy! His escape from the brothel owners and the stand-over thugs had my heart rate racing.

At certain passages you can't help but admire his bravery in seeking out sex partners, (he had a much higher sex drive than I had at his age), but on reflection the most endearing quality in this book is the brutal and very candid honesty that John is able to bring to his recollections of sexual discovery.

This is also a memoir of what it was like reaching out in the pre-Gaydar days and in a foreign land where males have sex with males, but don't necessarily identify as queer. The taboos of a culture steeped in tradition, where the male is to be married and raise a family to look after the parents in old age, would be a difficult one for a gay Indian man in the 1980s.

John explores this in selected passages and in a weird way echoes his own journey, as well as the struggles he faced with his own mother. When I turned the last page, I was pleased that I had undertaken this journey and met the myriad of characters from 30 years ago. I wonder now how their lives all turned out. It would be equally fascinating to go back and trace their stories as well.

This memoir is a must read.

*Terry Larder*

**<http://www.outinperth.com/john-burbidge-shares-a-coming-out-adventure-with-the-boatman>**