

# The final curtain

Even celebrities in the heartiest health must have been nervous in 2009. For some spooky reason it was the year of the celebrity stiff, with famous faces bowing out at an alarming rate. From politicians, pop stars, porn stars and presidential pets to marsupials and Munchkins, Matthew Myers turns the spotlight on those dearly departed souls who made our lives a little richer.



## STEPHEN GATELY

It's hard to believe that someone as young and vibrant as Stephen Gately is gone. The Boyzone singer's death was from pulmonary oedema (fluid on the lungs), which can affect anyone at any age, and his passing reminds us of our fragile mortality.

Gately was born in 1976 in Dublin, Ireland and appeared in school musical productions before joining the male vocal group Boyzone. From 1993, the band enjoyed six #1 hits in the UK charts, including *All That I Need*.

In 1999, at age 23, Gately came out in *The Sun* newspaper in London. A former Boyzone employee was planning to sell an "exclusive gay pop star exposé" on Gately to a tabloid. To their credit, *The Sun* tipped off Gately, giving him the chance to come out on his own terms. He spoke about his first boyfriend Stephen Howard who, after their split, had hanged himself in 1995. Howard had been a heroin addict. Three years later Gately began a relationship with Eloy De Jong from the Dutch boy band Caught In The Act.

After Boyzone split in 2000, Gately was the first to fly solo with the hit single and CD *New Beginning*. However, having also split from De

**"Stephen was a beautiful person in both body and spirit. We love you and will miss you forever."**

Jong, he suffered from depression and became addicted to prescription drugs. But Gately's life changed again when Elton John and David Furnish introduced him to Andrew Cowles. A 2003 commitment ceremony took place in Las Vegas, followed by a civil partnership in London three years later.

Gately returned to his original love – the theatre, and was cast as the lead in *Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* in 2002, as the Child Catcher in 2004's *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, and in a revival production of *Godspell* in 2007.

He participated in the popular UK reality TV series *Dancing On Ice*. He also recorded the classic ballad *Bright Eyes* for the reanimated version of *Watership Down* and voiced the rabbit character Blackavar, which was drawn in his likeness.

When Boyzone reformed in 2008 and released the single *Better*, the accompanying video included a controversial gay embrace between two men. Even though there was some criticism, the video, song and band were giving a nod to Gately and were embraced into gay culture.

When Gately died at the house he and Cowles owned in Port d'Andratx, Majorca, it became evident from news reports that a third person was present. Most people didn't care if it was a threesome or if they had simply been playing Scrabble. However, an unsavoury article from the *Daily Mail's* Jan Moir linked his death to his "homosexual lifestyle" and questioned civil unions for gay people. The item drew over 25,000 complaints to the Press Complaints Commission, causing their site to crash. Celebrities such as Stephen Fry, Paul O'Grady and Matt Lucas

railed against her homophobic write-up. From Facebook to Twitter, the controversy spread with advertisers such as Nestlé and Marks And Spencer disassociating themselves from the article. Gay people, Gately's fans and the people of Ireland united in their condemnation of Moir.

The silver lining, though, was that Moir's piece triggered a massive outpouring of love and support from the people who mattered most. U2 frontman Bono paid an emotional tribute to his friend during their global concert webcast in October, referring to Gately as a "beautiful spirit".

The surviving Boyzone members, Keith Duffy, Mikey Graham, Shane Lynch and Ronan Keating, accompanied Stephen's body from Majorca back to Ireland and held a vigil until the funeral. Held in Northern Dublin, over 1,000 people attended the service. In an emotional day, the Boyzone members paid tribute by singing and as pallbearers. Remarkably, they each also had tattoos of his initials and the years of his birth and death. They truly loved him as their brother and released a joint statement, part of which read, "Stephen was a beautiful person in both body and spirit. We love you and will miss you forever, Steo."



## FARRAH FAWCETT

Fawcett was best known for her stint as Jill Munroe on the successful television series *Charlie's Angels*. With her trademark flicks, her hairstyle became the style of the '70s, and she was a pin-up for horny teenagers the world over. Fawcett was married to the hunky Lee Majors (*The Six Million Dollar Man*)

before taking up with actor Ryan O'Neal in an off-gain-on-again relationship. Born 1947 in Corpus Christi, Texas, Fawcett was more than just a pretty face. She received critical acclaim for her performance in the controversial play *Extremities*, in which she played a rape victim. This led to further dramatic roles including the film version of *Extremities*. Fawcett and O'Neal were the Brangelina of their day and had a son, Redmond, who, along with the other O'Neal children, leads a troubled life. Fawcett's struggle with anal cancer was documented in the film *Farrah's Story*. When she died, both O'Neal and close friend Alana Stewart were at her side. Farrah was very fond of gay men and was chums with Madonna's brother Christopher Ciccone. In his infamous 2008 autobiography, Ciccone described how she accompanied him to the 2002 Oscars and to an after-party where all the queens instantly fell for her. There's no doubting that this angel lived up to her name.



## BEA ARTHUR

Arthur was a sitcom queen in the same ranks as Lucille Ball and Carol Burnett, with a baritone voice, sharp wit and amazing comic timing. She won Emmy awards for her signature roles on *Maude* and *The Golden Girls*. Both roles centred on liberal, freethinking characters, not unlike Arthur herself. Born Bernice Frankel in New York City in 1922, she forged a career in Off-Broadway shows such

as *Threepenny Opera*, *Fiddler On The Roof* and won the 1966 Tony Award as Vera Charles in *Mame*. It was television director Norman Lear who gave Arthur the role of outspoken liberal feminist Maude before she went on to the *Golden Girls*' sharp-witted Dorothy Zbornak. Arthur married twice and had two adopted sons. From gay rights to animal rights, she was an outspoken champion. It was recently revealed that Arthur bequeathed \$300,000 to a New York shelter for homeless gay youth. Of her career, she always said she was "in awe of television writers". After her death, New York's Broadway district dimmed its lights for one minute in her honour. Her good friend Angela Lansbury said, "She became and has remained my bosom buddy."



## WENDY RICHARD

Born 1943 in Middlesbrough, England, Wendy Emerton changed her last name to Richard and became a household name through a television career that lasted 40 years. Her two most prominent roles were as Miss Brahms on *Are You Being Served?* and Pauline Fowler in the long-running UK soap *East Enders*. But she also appeared in many British classics including *Dad's Army*, the *Carry On* films and even had a part in the 1965 Beatles movie *Help!* One of her last roles was on the camped-up British comedy *Benidorm* as the sun-soaked, wheelchair-bound Sylvia. It was cancer that finally claimed Richard and though she had no children, she married four times. Many will remember her as the matriarch of *East Enders* but to most she was the cheeky Cockney sales assistant behind the counter at Grace Brothers department store.

## PATRICK SWAYZE

Once named the Sexiest Man Alive, Patrick Wayne Swayze was the romantic lead actor of the '80s. Born in 1952 in Houston, Texas, he was noted for his dancing ability. *Dirty Dancing*, *Ghost* and *The Outsiders* are among his most popular films but let's not forget when he frocked up for 1995's *Too Wong Foo, Thanks For Everything*, *Julie Newmar*, where he played drag queen Vida. It's no surprise that Swayze led the career he did. His mother was a dance instructor/choreographer and he went on to study gymnastics, ice skating and classical ballet. Swayze's acting credits run as far back as *M.A.S.H.* and *The Outsiders*, where he formed part of the Brat Pack with Rob Lowe and Emilio Estevez. But it was 1987's *Dirty Dancing* that truly launched the actor into stardom – and let's not forget his top-ten soundtrack single *She's Like The Wind*! His later film roles were somewhat smaller – *Point Break*, *Waking Up In Reno* and *Donnie Darko*. Swayze also played *Chicago*'s Billy Flynn on Broadway and in 2006 starred in the West End production of *Guys And Dolls*. He was a licensed pilot, bred Arabian horses and was a former Scientologist. However, unlike most Hollywood marriages, Swayze and his wife Lisa Niemi married in 1975 and remained together until his death of pancreatic cancer in September. He was 57.



## MICHAEL JACKSON

Jackson was a leading pop idol of the 20th Century. His passing from cardiac arrest was so unexpected that it falls into the same "Do you remember where you were the day he died?" category as Elvis Presley, John Lennon and Kurt Cobain. Born in 1958 in Gary, Indiana, Jackson grew up in what would become one of the most famous rock families in the world. After success as a child singing up front of his older brothers in The Jackson Five, he broke away with a solo career that eventually made him one of the most successful performers in entertainment history. Jackson will be remembered for the album *Thriller*, which has sold over 109 million copies, his thrilling live shows and his high-energy dance styles. He will also be remembered for his unfortunate excursions into plastic surgery, dangling his son Blanket over a hotel balcony and a litany of bizarre behaviours. It all ended, his death attributed to the abuse of prescription sedatives, as Jackson prepared to tour the world. His career never recovered from the child sex allegations, which began in the 1990s and plagued him until his death. Jackson always protested his innocence, being acquitted of the final allegation and charge in 2005.

## HOLLY WOOD

The lovable red-haired veteran social writer for Perth's *Sunday Times* died of cancer at the age of 68. Affectionately known as Holly, the popular columnist was the toast of Perth's fashion, society and charity circles. Born in 1941 in Melbourne, Robin Pulham was abandoned at three weeks of age and made a ward of the state. After being taken in by foster parents, they returned him(!) to the notorious Turana Boys Home. Until the age of 14, he was tossed back and forward from boys' homes to numerous foster families where he was both sexually and physically abused. Pulham attempted suicide but finally turned his life around. He secured a job and became a beloved Melbourne drag queen. In 1975 he moved to Perth and took the name Holly Wood from Holly Golightly of *Breakfast At Tiffany's*' fame. During his career, Wood sold antiques, ran restaurants and even formed a cult following with handbag tossing at the Gay Olympics. Openly gay, he worked tirelessly for charities, including the Australian Red Cross, Make A Wish Foundation, Youth Focus, the WA AIDS Council and the Variety WA Toy Bank, which he founded. No wonder he won the City Of Perth Citizen Of The Year 1999

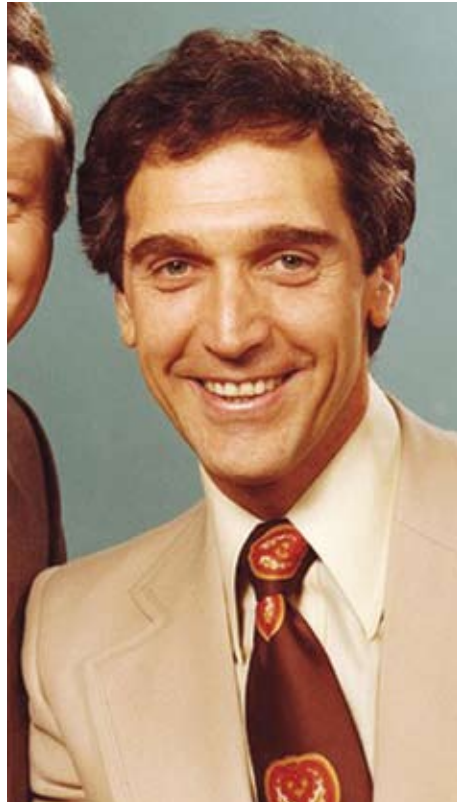


and Centenary Medal! But it was his column in the *Sunday Times* that endeared him to people from all walks of life. Still working a week before his death, Holly Wood proves that despite the horrors and adversities of life, you can make your life, and the life of others, something special. The *Sunday Times*' Managing Director, Ish Davies, said, "I had never met a person who was so universally known and universally liked."



### KEVIN MCGEE

Known as the husband and then ex-husband of Matt Lucas (*Little Britain*), McGee sadly took his own life, leaving a suicide note on Facebook. Born in 1977, McGee was a television producer who was drawn into the spotlight when he married Lucas in a lavish ceremony in 2006. The wedding guest list included Courtney Love, Elton John and Stephen Gately. When McGee and Lucas later divorced, it was highlighted as the first gay celebrity divorce following the legalisation of same-sex marriage in the UK. The couple's relationship suffered, mainly due to McGee's drug taking. Lucas was understandably devastated over McGee's death and pulled out of his appearance in the West End play *Prick Up Your Ears*.



### DON LANE

He was Australia's answer to Johnny Carson. In fact, the tall American entertainer even got his start on the classic *Ed Sullivan Show*. Born in 1933 in New York City, Morton Donald Isaacson grew up in The Bronx. Lane took his stage name from American singer Frankie Laine and became part of the nightclub cabaret set, working with the likes of Wayne Newton and Sammy Davis Jr. It's of no surprise, then, that he managed to score such big names for his successful *The Don Lane Show* throughout the '70s and '80s. Lane also served as an officer in the US Army and later spent time entertaining the troops. When looking for a new talk show host, it was Wayne Newton who originally suggested Don's name to Channel Nine producers. *The Don Lane Show* became legendary. His guests included Liza Minnelli, Mohammed Ali, David Bowie, Robin Williams, Tina Turner, John Travolta, Sylvester Stallone, Dean Martin, Alice Cooper, Dolly Parton, Kermit The Frog and ABBA. Appearances by psychics such as Uri Geller and Doris Stokes also drew huge ratings. Then, of course, there was his beloved sidekick – Bert Newton. Lane won a staggering 15 Logie Awards, including the Gold Logie. Earlier this year, Lane's son PJ Isaacson interrupted his basketball career to care for his father in Australia. Lane eventually succumbed to a form of advanced dementia. Of his passing, former TV partner and friend Bert Newton said, "I can't think of anyone I liked more in the industry or anyone I enjoyed working with more."



### MOLLY SUGDEN

The lovable Sugden was best remembered as Mrs Slocombe on the classic British sitcom *Are You Being Served?* The show, known for its bawdy sexual innuendos, often featured jokes in reference to Mrs Slocombe's pussy. Whether it was wet, being stroked or had its hair standing on end, the gag was a stalwart of the show's humour. Born in 1922 in Yorkshire, England, Mary Isobel Sugden studied at the Guildhall School Of Music And Drama in London and found her way into repertory theatre. She married in 1958 and had twin sons. She also appeared on *The Goodies*, *Benny Hill* and the *Are You Being Served?* spin-off *Grace And Favour*. Bowing out in great style, her final on-screen appearance was on *Little Britain*, where she played herself.

#### Mrs Slocombe's top five pussy jokes:

"You're lucky to have me at all, Captain Peacock. I had to thaw me pussy out before I came. It had been out all night."

"You know, animals are very psychic. I mean, the least sign of danger and my pussy's hair stands on end."

"The central heating broke down. I had to light the oven and hold my pussy in front."

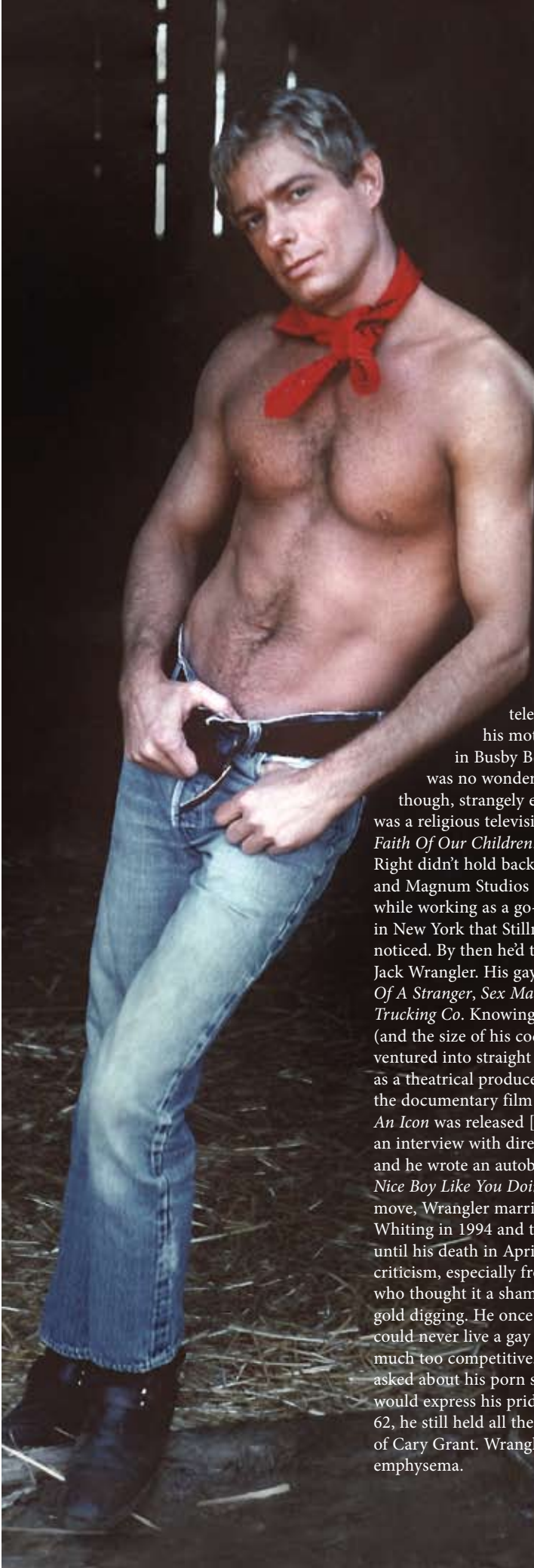
"The last time I was late, a fireman had to climb out of my bedroom window and risk his life on a narrow ledge tryin' to grab hold of my pussy."

"Well, you know how clumsy those removal men are. I'm not havin' 'em handlin' my pussy."



## JOHN HUGHES

When it comes to '80s pop culture, you can easily set the scene with a John Hughes movie. The film director, producer and writer was responsible for such classics as *Sixteen Candles*, *The Breakfast Club* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. Born in 1950 in Lansing, Michigan, Hughes began as a copywriter in Chicago before writing jokes for the likes of Joan Rivers and Rodney Dangerfield. Hughes went on to write for the infamous *National Lampoon* magazine, where he wrote his first screenplay, *Class Reunion*. But it was when he penned *National Lampoon's Vacation* (based on his own experiences) in 1983 that his career took off. He went on to direct *Sixteen Candles* in 1984, followed by the many other teen high school flicks of the era. Noted for his great depiction of teenage life, he often shot on location in his home area of Northbrook, Illinois, but referred to it as Shermer, the area's original name. Hughes married his high school sweetheart and had two sons. He launched such notable careers as Matthew Broderick (*Ferris Bueller*), Emilio Estevez (*The Breakfast Club*), Macaulay Culkin (*Home Alone*) and many of the famed Brat Pack. In later life, the director became reclusive and rarely gave interviews. In his final years he retired to the life of a farmer in his home state of Illinois. He died of a heart attack while visiting his family in New York.



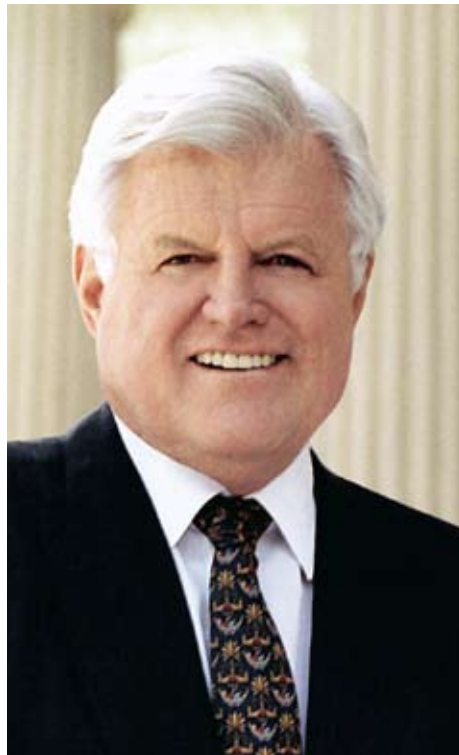
## JACK WRANGLER

Born in 1946 in Beverly Hills, California, John Robert Stillman was a founding star of the gay adult film industry. Stillman's father was a Hollywood television producer and his mother had been a dancer in Busby Berkeley musicals. It was no wonder he went into showbiz, though, strangely enough, his first venture was a religious television series called *The Faith Of Our Children*. But the Religious Right didn't hold back the future porn-stud and Magnum Studios signed him up. It was while working as a go-go dancer and stripper in New York that Stillman was originally noticed. By then he'd taken on the name of Jack Wrangler. His gay films included *Eyes Of A Stranger*, *Sex Machine* and *Kansas City Trucking Co.* Knowing the value of his work (and the size of his cock), Wrangler also ventured into straight porn. He made a name as a theatrical producer and director. In 2008, the documentary film *Wrangler: Anatomy Of An Icon* was released [turn to page 74 to read an interview with director Jeffrey Schwarz] and he wrote an autobiography, *What's A Nice Boy Like You Doing?* in 1984. In an odd move, Wrangler married cabaret star Margaret Whiting in 1994 and they stayed together until his death in April. His marriage attracted criticism, especially from the gay community, who thought it a sham and accused him of gold digging. He once said, "I'm gay, but I could never live a gay lifestyle, because I'm much too competitive." In later years, when asked about his porn star past, Wrangler would express his pride. Even at the age of 62, he still held all the charisma and charm of Cary Grant. Wrangler was claimed by emphysema.



## WALTER CRONKITE

Probably the most famous newsreader in the world, Cronkite was born in 1916. He brought to America first-hand news reports on such events as the Vietnam War, Watergate and the moon landing. But it was breaking the news of the assassination of President John F Kennedy to a stunned world on November 22, 1963 that gave the anchorman his most famous bulletin. In 1973, gay rights activist Mark Segal stormed onto the *CBS Evening News* and held a placard in front of Cronkite reading "Gays Protest CBS Prejudice". Segal was charged, tried and given a \$450 fine, but he also came out with a new friend and supporter of gay rights – Walter Cronkite! The newsman had discovered a whole new cause and even befriended Segal. Segal now runs his own gay newspaper, the *Philadelphia Gay News*. On Cronkite's passing, he said, "I am amazed and humbled by his willingness to reach out to me. He was a bridge between the gay movement and major media. We remained friends and it was a privilege knowing him."



## TED KENNEDY

To say Kennedy was a historical political figure would be an understatement. Edward Moore 'Ted' Kennedy was born in 1932 in Boston, Massachusetts and was the youngest brother in the ill-fated Kennedy family. In an unusual life, Teddy Kennedy saw the assassination of both brothers, President John F Kennedy and Senator Robert F Kennedy. He entered the US Senate in 1962, filling the seat previously held by his brother, JFK. Kennedy was not immune to his own tragedies, including a devastating plane crash in 1964. But it was the scandalous 1969 Chappaquiddick affair, where Kennedy left the scene of a car accident where his passenger Mary Jo Kopechne died, that tarnished his reputation. Regardless, the senator was re-elected and even ran in the 1980 presidential election against Jimmy Carter. Kennedy married twice and had three children but he also became a surrogate father to the 13 children of his assassinated brothers. Known as the "lion of the Senate", he campaigned for minorities, which included civil rights, AIDS care, disability discrimination and support for same-sex marriage.

## DANNY LA RUE

Born in 1927 in Cork, Ireland, Daniel Patrick Carroll grew up in Soho, London after his family emigrated when he was six. Although he developed an interest in theatre, La Rue also served in the British Royal Navy. In fact, he first dressed in costume during a World War II naval concert in Singapore. The rest is history. Carroll became La Rue, one of the most famous drag queens in the world – though he preferred the term "comic in a frock". He



was one of Britain's highest paid acts and was the first drag act on the bill at a Royal Variety Performance. He even played Dolly Levi in the British stage production of *Hello Dolly*. La Rue's partner for many years was his manager, Jack Hanson, who died in 1984. La Rue was 81 when he died in May from prostate cancer.



## MILLVINA DEAN

Born 1912 in London, Dean was the last remaining survivor of the *RMS Titanic* disaster. Being only nine weeks old at the time, she was also the youngest passenger. Although her father perished, she escaped in Lifeboat 10 with her mother and older brother Bertram. Dean never >>

>> married or had children and it was only in her later life that she embraced peoples' interest in the *Titanic* disaster. She appeared at numerous *Titanic*-related events including documentaries and interviews. However, she was critical of the *Doctor Who* Christmas special *Voyage Of The Damned*, which featured Kylie Minogue. She believed it was disrespectful to make entertainment out of such a tragedy. Towards the end of her life, Dean was forced to sell her *Titanic*-related possessions in order to pay for her care. Shortly before her death, the Titanic International Society set up The Millvina Fund, in which sizable donations were contributed from Kate Winslet, Leonardo DiCaprio, Celine Dion and James Cameron.



## MICKEY CARROLL

Born in 1919 in St Louis, Missouri, Finocchiaro was not just any American actor – he was one of the last remaining Munchkins from *The Wizard Of Oz*. Carroll met Jack Haley (Tin Man) at the Fox Theatre in St Louis, who took him to Hollywood where he worked with Mae West. While at MGM, he attended school with Judy Garland and a friendship developed. Garland not only put him up for the part but provided a place to stay during filming. After walking down the yellow brick road, he gave up acting, but returned to the limelight when the Munchkins were honoured with a star on the Hollywood Walk Of Fame. ★

If you are feeling distressed, support is available by calling SANE Helpline on 1800 187 263 or Lifeline on 131 114.

## THE QUIET ACHIEVERS



**Ron Gonzalez** Born and raised in New York City, the openly gay Gonzalez worked tirelessly for AIDS Community Services to educate gay youth about health and safe-sex issues. He was one of the 50 passengers to die onboard Continental flight 3407, which crashed in Clarence Center, New York last February.



**Bob Cole** From South Florida, Cole was a gay activist and nationally recognised philanthropist. He suffered for many years from HIV. Over the years he donated thousands of dollars to the YES Institute, which works to prevent gay-teen suicide and other gay non-profits. He was 66.



**Rodger McFarlane** The Denver-based advocate for gay rights and HIV-AIDS treatment died while travelling through New Mexico after heart problems. Fifty-four-year-old McFarlane was executive director of the Gill Foundation and wrote *The Complete Bedside Companion: A No Nonsense Guide To Caring For The Seriously Ill*.



**Thembi Ngubane** The South African AIDS activist gained worldwide fame for her radio diaries about her struggle with AIDS. She died of tuberculosis last June. Ngubane was only 24. She leaves behind a four-year-old daughter.



**Keith Goddard** International Zimbabwean gay leader Keith Goddard died from pneumonia last October. Goddard dedicated his life to helping gay rights, particularly through the Gay And Lesbians Of Zimbabwe Association. He was 49.

## VICTIMS OF SENSELESS HATE



**Craig Cohen** From Florida, USA, Cohen died from injuries after an attack by four men in April. He was set upon after leaving a restaurant in Ft Lauderdale. His attackers jumped on his head and left him bleeding. Cohen never regained consciousness after falling into a coma.



**Christopher Skinner** Was brutally murdered in October after leaving his sister's birthday party. The senseless and unprovoked attack happened in Toronto, Canada.



**Ian Baynham** The 62-year-old civil servant was murdered in a gay hate attack in London's Trafalgar Square in September. His life support was turned off 18 days after the attack.

## ANIMALS CROSSING OVER



**Sam The Koala** The little koala, who was actually female, became the face of the Black Saturday bushfires which devastated Victoria in February. Footage from a mobile phone caught the badly burnt Koala drinking from a water bottle at the hand of firefighter David Tree. The video and image attracted media attention around the globe, including CNN, *The New York Times* and Ellen DeGeneres, who featured Sam on her talk show. It turned out the famous image of Sam was actually taken a week before the bush fires tragedy during back burning operations. Sam was euthanised during surgery to remove ovarian cysts.



**Mr Percival** This dignified pelican found fame in the classic 1976 film *Storm Boy*. Mr Percival became an animal icon to all children of the era, even impressing the US presidential family of the day, the Carters. The film was based on Colin Thiele's novel about a boy raising three pelicans. Mr Percival died at the Adelaide Zoo, aged in his mid-thirties. His co-star Greg Rowe, now 45, lives with his wife and two children in Toronto, Canada. On hearing of his friend's death, Rowe said he had many fun memories of the beloved pelican.



**Socks The Cat** Best known as The First Cat, Socks belonged to the Clinton family and lived at The White House with Bill and Hill. The cat was immortalised in children's books, websites, stamps, television and even took part in the 2002 Little Rock Christmas parade. But, strangest of all, Socks featured in the *Outland* comic strip, where he was outed and in a relationship with a cat named Bill. Together they appeared on a talk show discussing the topic of Gay Presidential Pets.