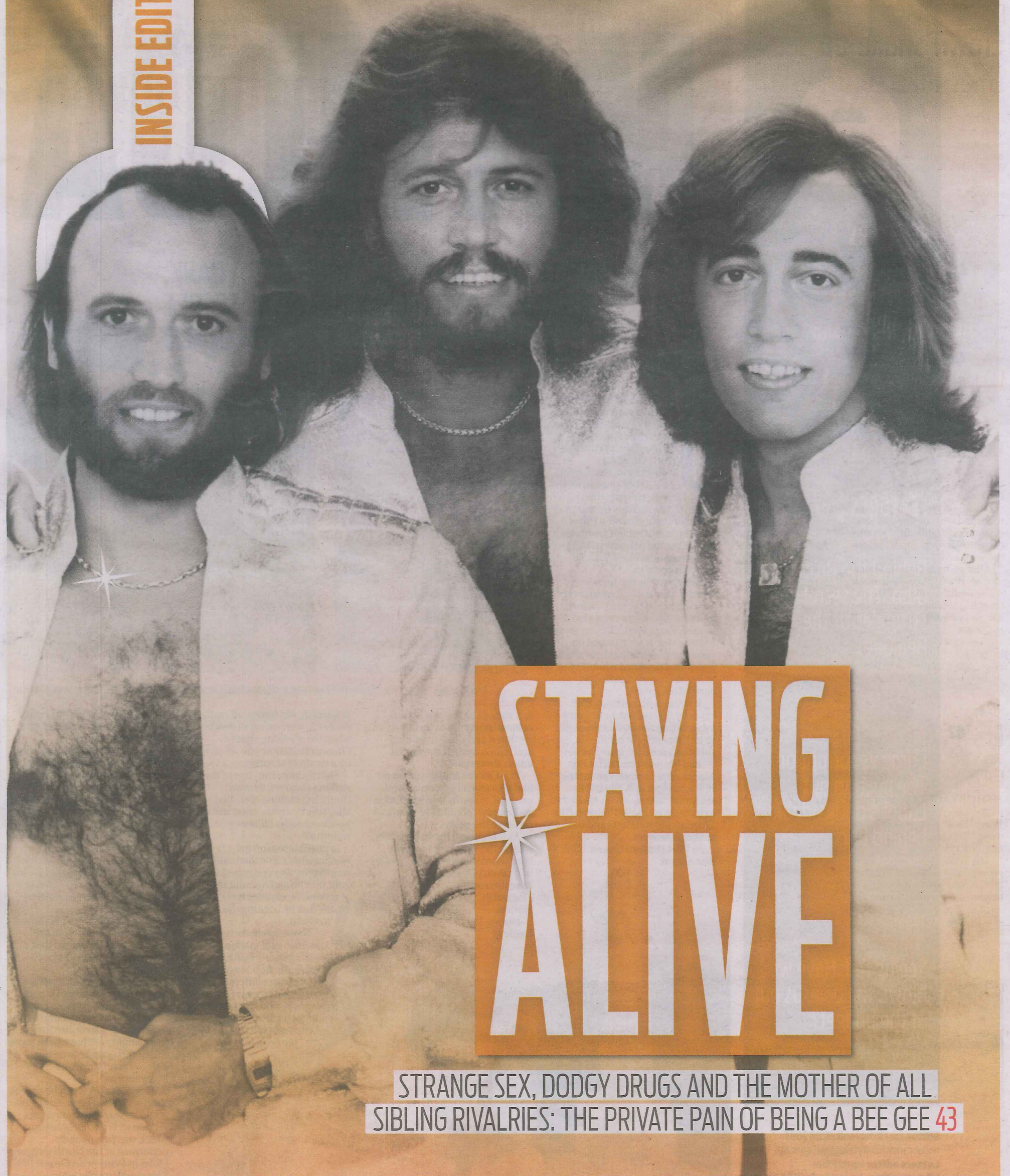


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**INSIDE EDITION**



# STAYING ALIVE

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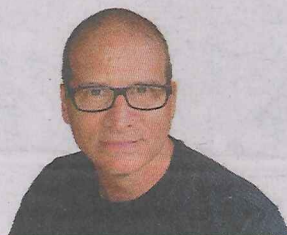
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# MY LIFE, GONE AWAY



BEHIND THE SHINY SMILES AND SHINIER OUTFITS, AUSTRALIA'S GREATEST MUSICAL GROUP KEPT SOME DARK SECRETS, WRITES **DAVID N. MEYER**



**B**eyond the basic Bee Gees mystery of 'who are these guys?' lies the more pervasive and enduring mystery of why do we all so respond to their music? When I started this book and began to tick off Bee Gees lyrics in my head, I was surprised at how many songs I remembered whole or in part. I was also surprised, given that I cannot carry a tune, at how many I could hum or sing. When I asked my music-obsessed friends — none of whom ever mentioned the Bee Gees — I learned that all of them could hum or sing multiple Bee Gees songs. The Bee Gees are everywhere and in everyone's heads, and still outside their legion of die-hard

fans don't get the respect they deserve. They are never held up as icons of anything we hold up pop stars as icons of: not of genius or sex appeal or style or innovation or imagination or transgression. The most unfair and least accurate slander to hurl at the Bee Gees is imitators. Over the decades, so many rock and cultural writers, most of whom should have known better, defaulted to that slander instead of listening with open ears. To name only the best-known examples of the Bee Gees singularity, *Jive Talkin'* sounds like nothing else before or since. It's wholly original; revolutionary.

*New York Mining Disaster 1941 (Have You Seen My Wife, Mr Jones?)* and *To Love*

*Somebody*, ditto. *Nights On Broadway* and *Stayin' Alive*, like *Jive Talkin'*, owe nothing to nobody.

The early Bee Gees may evoke the Beatles or the Hollies. The middle Bee Gees may evoke Donovan.

The later Bee Gees may evoke Stevie Wonder. But that's all they do, evoke.

In their early days, The Beatles and the Rolling Stones imitated or covered their influences. Both bands' early records feature covers of, or direct cops from, their idols.

But few accused them of imitation, either because nobody knew the music of their influences (Irma Thomas's version, for example, of *Time Is On My Side* for the Stones or the Isley

Brothers *Twist And Shout* for the Beatles) or because by the time the Beatles and Stones imitated their influences, their influences had become part of the canon (Muddy Waters for the Stones, for example, or Little Richard for the Beatles). The Bee Gees came to rock 'n' roll so late, and were so young when they hit big, that their main influences were still on the charts.

The inescapable dynamics of band and family life make the Bee Gees even more anomalous, opaque, indecipherable and bizarre. They composed, played and toured together for 40 years! With their parents right there on the bus, in the studio, waiting in the kitchen, minding the kids, loading the dishwasher

all wrong, etc. If family dynamics are unbearable and band dynamics are unbearable, how did the Bee Gees bear it?

One way was by conspicuous consumption of almost anything that could be consumed — women, clothes, drugs, liquor, cars, boats, houses, etc. But compensatory over-consumptions are a sadly normal feature of family life and one great allure of being in a band. That the Bee Gees' success allowed them to consume like King Farouk seems hardly worth mentioning. The wages of their various sins became all too apparent over the years.

Most family acts that endure for decades cite outside religious influences. Not the Bee Gees; they learned how to live with each other, however painfully. Also, they never trusted anyone outside the family. Until the various resentments became too deep, they took advice and support from one another.

And for decades, the Gibb twins took orders from Barry. Hands down, Barry won the

Gibb genetic lottery. From the earliest photographs of the boys performing together in their pathetic tuxedos in the dinner theatres of Australia, seventeen-year-old Barry looked indestructible.

As the band got popular, then famous, then forgotten and then more famous than anyone in popular music before them, Barry became only more radiant. The Beta twins, Robin and Maurice, took second and third place to Barry's incontrovertible Alpha.

Andy, some years later, had the looks and energy to surpass the twins, but proved weaker on the inside. Andy had Barry's head hair and chest hair and teeth and inner glow. But Andy lacked a sufficiently bulletproof shell to live the famous Gibb life. That life ate him up. Barry gobbled it down and asked for more, never once saying either please or sir. Now, Barry's the last man standing.

Barry evokes a centaur. His glossy mane and glowing equine eyes, that Roman nose

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with its great horsy nostrils and those piano-key teeth shining above an endless jaw just waiting for a bit. He looks like a stallion, of course, which means he bestrides the planet as he pleases and as Keith Richard said: has the right to piss in the street.

In those outsized eyes burns the flame of shrewdness, remove, constant strategy and no small amount of hostility. Barry possesses the voice of an angel, and that isn't a devil on his shoulder. It's a chip, and fifty years of unimaginable success have neither reduced nor dislodged it. Barry's a centaur, and he's also always been Odysseus, a cunning, distanced man prepared for the journey, determined not merely to survive but to prevail, to cope with whatever and impose his will. Barry is not a guy to get lost in song, to give in to the frail emotions.

And so far, Barry's never been bested. You might think that between the Beatles and McCartney's solo records, Sir Paul is the most successful, Alpha of the Alphas. But Paul never purpose-built number ones for others. Barry has written double-digit number ones for other artists, songs tailored to their sounds and personae that rang the bell worldwide.

When he was only 22, Barry wrote the greatest Otis Redding song Otis Redding never recorded, *To Love Somebody*. But if Otis never recorded it — he died before he could — everyone else on the planet did.

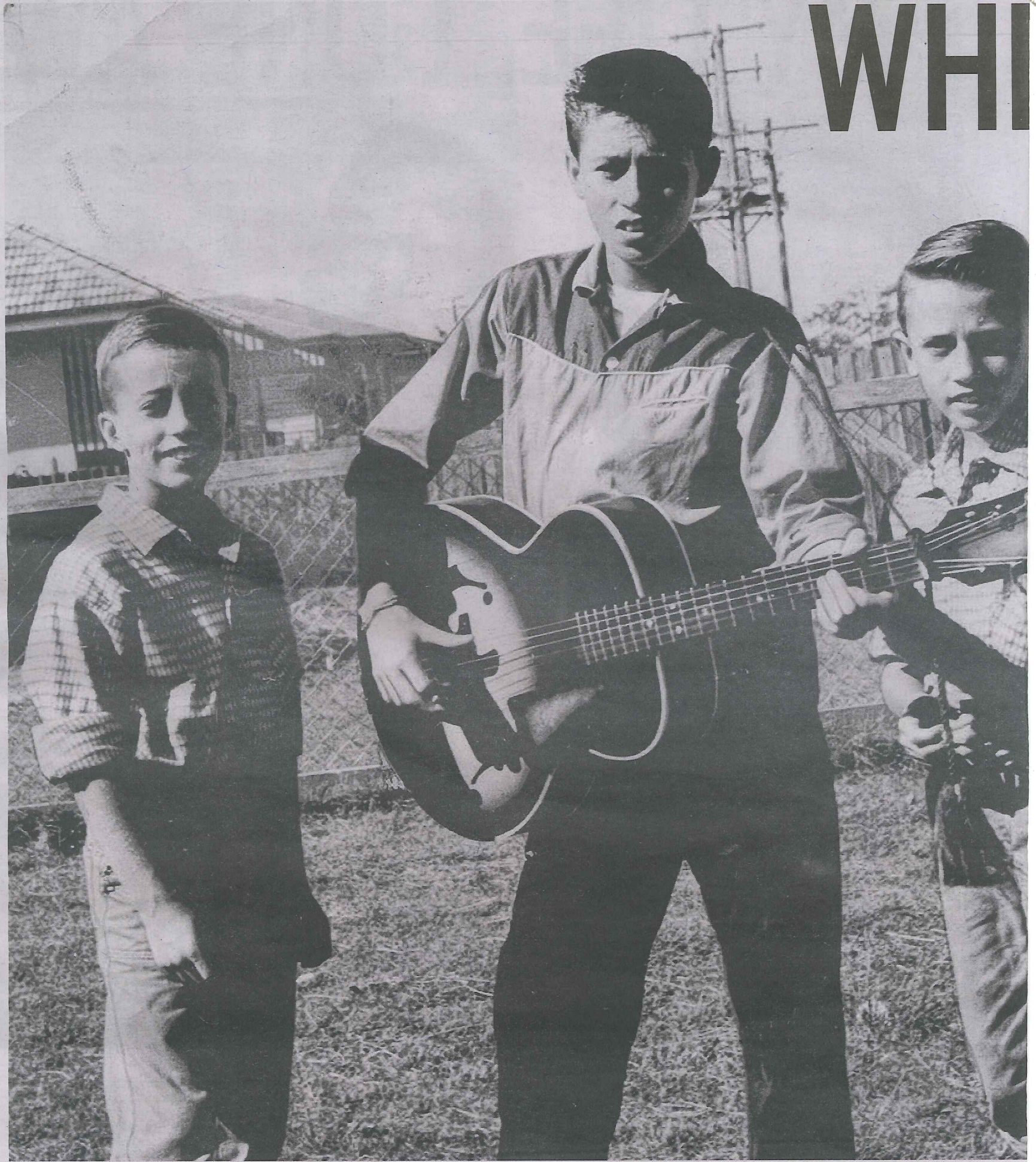
Barry's purpose-built number ones are hard to identify because he seldom copped to writing something for somebody else. He'd say: Oh, I found an old song and it worked out for them. Only Odysseus pulls off such self-deprecating boasting.

Barry's Alpha-hood spawned some tough moments. Barry stopped letting Robin sing lead, even on Robin's own compositions. Robin absorbed a hard lesson in what it meant to be a Beta younger brother, one of many such lessons inflicted over the decades. Maurice had subsumed those same lessons long before. Maurice, who — until alcohol overtook him — could play any instrument he touched, routinely spent three-quarters of a set on stage without getting near a mic.

Andy Gibb was handed a career based on singing songs that Barry had written or co-written and produced. The gig paid large, and made Andy an international heartthrob. But Andy couldn't live out the basic premise that his career was Barry's Lite and his over-consumption took a bad turn.

Throughout the years, no matter how successful or reviled, the Bee Gees remained, in so many ways, ridiculous. Their ridiculousness forces even those who love them to shrug and smile. And those who find the Bee Gees a contemptible plastic amalgam of cheesy pop and pernicious disco still admit, in whispers, to having deep emotions or meaningful memories built around one or two Bee Gees tunes.

Everyone on the planet knows all or part of a Bee Gees song. No matter who you ask, no matter their level of hipness, musical sophistication, literacy, geographical location or familiarity with the English language; in Timbuktu or Mindanao, in Buenos Aires or Shanghai, in Kiev or Nairobi, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan or Gainesville, Georgia, stop the first person you see who's older than fifteen



Robin, Barry and Maurice Gibb in Brisbane in 1960, before they skyrocketed to success. Already Ba

and ask them to hum a Bee Gees song. Not to name one to hum or sing. And they will, smiling guiltily. Then ask them the same thing about Garth Brooks.

With the Beatles or Madonna, that kind of global market penetration makes instinctive sense. Its easier, somehow, to acknowledge that their songs are in the ether. The Bee Gees are the ether. The Bee Gees made hits for 40 years, they sold a quarter of a billion albums, everyone on earth knows their music and yet, they still seem like they don't really belong.

### DOWN CAME THE SUN

THE toxic level of Robin's amphetamine addiction in the late 1970s and early '80s turned him threatening, rageful, and paranoid during his divorce from Molly Hullis.

One late night, wired up on speed and accompanied by a

private detective, Robin broke into his former house, where Molly lived with their children, while Molly and the kids were elsewhere. Robin still held the deed to the house and had keys to the locks. He did not have to force his way in, but he did. Robin found innocuous documents in the house that, in his deluded state, he thought suggested a plot by Molly and her lawyers to extort him for £5 million.

Robin believed Molly was having an affair with her divorce attorney. He sought documents that would prove the attorney and Molly were baiting him and trying to get Robin to publicly accuse Molly of infidelity. If he did, Robin's fantasy went, Molly would then sue him for the £5 million. That delusion led to a harrowing series of letters, phone calls and threatening telegrams, which were eventu-

ally forwarded to the FBI. Part of one telegram read: "What you have done is just about the limit. I warned and warned you. The situation is now very serious. Know (sic) one walks all over me... I have had enough. I have taken out a contract... It is now a question of time."

The FBI wanted to interview him. Robin sent his attorney, who said that "his client would not be foolish enough to carry out any threat especially in view of his singing career," and Molly and her lawyers were attempting to use the FBI to embarrass Gibb and to bring pressure on him in the divorce proceedings.

Robin's intake had produced all the classic speed-freak symptoms: frightening weight loss, paranoid delusions, irrationality, hypersexuality and becoming an unbearable pain in the ass to anyone who cared for him.

"I remember being asleep and getting a call from Robin at lam," said Christopher Hutchins, Robins former manager. "He was saying, 'It's an emergency,' and asking me to drive to his house in Knightsbridge." When Hutchins got to Robin's house, he found Robin in bed with a woman. "We have to go out and get a woman," Robin told him. "(Robin's) thing was to watch two women together," Hutchins said.

"In his drugged-up state he thought I would help him. His house at the time was a beautiful Georgian place near Harrods. One time, I noticed handprints on the walls, about 8ft up. Obviously, some strange sexual adventures had been going on. He was always seeking a treatment for his addiction. He'd work through the night, never going to bed. Night and day meant nothing to him. He took

uppers to keep him awake and downers to put him to sleep."

Around this time, Robin met his future wife, Dwina Murphy. Nobody in the Bee Gees saga was ever on the receiving end of so much rage and scorn, not only from the Gibb family, but from Bee Gees fans as well. It's hard to see why Dwina was selected as the arch-villain.

She and Robin talked about their sex lives with a candour so explicit it could be traumatising to the listener, but they appear to have been genuinely in love. Dwina helped Robin with his drug addiction, and they stayed together until his death.

Robin's divorce was finalised near the end of 1980. There was endless litigation; custody battles over their children raged until 1983. Robin narrowly avoided jail after a judge ordered him not to discuss the custody proceedings and Robin

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# WHERE IS THE SUN?

**Robin's intake had produced all the classic speed-freak symptoms: weight loss, paranoid delusions, irrationality and hypersexuality**

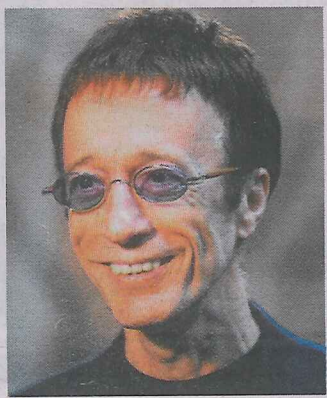
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The program for Robin Gibb's funeral last year.



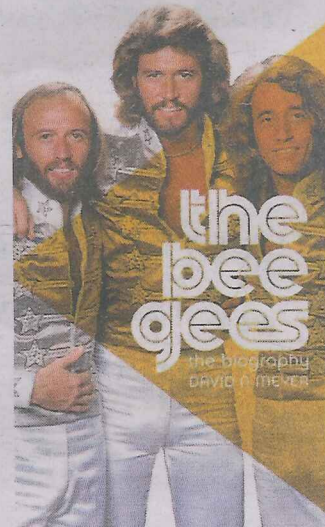
Dwina, Robin-John and Robin, who embraced sex and drugs.



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with colon cancer, which spread to the liver. It's taken a toll, naturally. I have undergone chemotherapy, however, and the results, to quote my doctor, have been 'spectacular'."

Robin spoke of Maurice's death: "How did I get over Maurice's death? I didn't. And I never will. I just don't accept it. I tell myself he's away on a long holiday and that we'll be seeing each other again soon. I sometimes wonder if all the tragedies my family has suffered, like Andy and Maurice dying so young and everything that's happened to me recently, is a kind of karmic price we are paying for all the fame and fortune we've had. However, I'm truly grateful that working on *The Titanic Requiem* distracted me from my illness to such a degree that I truly believe it might have saved my life."

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"At first Dwina was happy for Robin to sow his oats because it allowed her to stay committed to her Brahman beliefs," said a family friend (Dwina had converted to the Brahman religion, which called for sexual abstinence), "but she never expected him to actually plant his seed, as it were. When the truth came out, Dwina was furious. To say she hit the roof is an understatement. She felt betrayed."

Snow Robin's birth certificate listed Robin, "professional musician," as the father. Robin installed Claire and Snow Robin in a nearby farm, hired Claire a nanny and was a frequent visitor.

On March 19, 2012, Robin released *The Titanic Requiem*, which he composed and executed with his son. "It has been an incredible experience working with my son RJ," Robin said. "There is a creative freedom and uninhibited state that comes from working with a family member. Working on this album and with RJ has been a driving force, and one that has helped me on the road to recovery."

Robin had been looking increasingly skeletal, and rumours abounded about his ill-health.

"I get annoyed with

false stories about me," he said, "because I feel great and I look forward to the future. Recent months have been a testing time. I've had a scare. But now I'm happy to say I'm nearly better. For more than 18 months I lived with an inflammation of the colon. Then I was diagnosed



Barry was clearly the alpha brother.

told the press all about them. On October 28, 1983, Robin announced to the world that he had a new son, Robin-John, who had been born the previous February. "We wanted little Robin and he's wonderful," Robin said, "but neither Molly, my former wife, nor my other two children know about him yet. I will be introducing the children to their little brother, but it's still too early and the situation is too fragile."

Robin explained his curious behaviour about the baby and his divorce by saying: "I developed a terrible mistrust of women. It's taken a while for me to get over it. But having the baby with Dwina sealed our happiness."

Robin and Dwina were married on July 31, 1985.

"I'd always fought against the idea of marriage, living with one person," Dwina said. "But I

liked the idea of having a child with Robin. I recognised his creative spirit, his gentleness, the poet in him, and I thought ours would be good genes to put together. We tried to have a child, off and on, but it didn't happen until I moved in with him. We got closer and closer; I felt he was my brother, my lover, my son, my father. We got married in 1985, on the eve of Lughnasadh, the turning point of the year."

Citing Lughnasadh, a Gaelic harvest festival, in one of her first public pronouncements, set the tone for Dwina's image; she was henceforth regarded as a New Age nutcase. Robin spent much of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s enjoying the comfort of his family, the comfort of others, and learning that some things are better left unsaid.

He appeared in the papers again in 1997, when the British

government, at the conclusion of an investigation of music stars who weren't paying taxes on their royalties, forced the Bee Gees to pay £3 million in a settlement. Robin had to pay the most — £1.8 million. Regardless of the size of the settlement, Robin's quality of life did not seem to suffer.

The year 2009 marked the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Bee Gees. To celebrate the occasion, Barry and Robin began performing under the Bee Gees moniker, despite retiring the name upon Maurice's death. Among other events, they appeared on *Dancing With The Stars* and *American Idol*. Robin hinted at a reconciliation tour with his brother, but no concerts were ever booked.

On November 4, 2009, Dwina and Robin's housekeeper, Claire Yang, 33, gave birth to her and Robin's daughter, Snow Robin.