

The order is for two of the Gold Bar's signature martinis. Nic chills two martini glasses and then dashes the ice into the sink, leaving the interior surface of the glass beaded with cold tears. He takes down a crystal perfume atomiser from the shelf and gives each glass two squirts of vermouth.

This image of a man in a black tux wielding a perfume atomiser looks *just so*.

"Now for the signature." Nic adjusts the grind on the dispenser and dusts the interior of each glass with flecks of gold leaf.

"I read that gold can cut the lining of the throat and a person can drown in their own blood," I say.

"The Egyptians imbibed gold for thousands of years," says Nic. "It's meant to extend life, not end it."

He pulls a frost covered bottle from the freezer compartment of the small fridge. He wraps the bottle in a napkin and spansks it until it shoots out frozen slugs of gin.

"I didn't think you could freeze alcohol."

"The freezer is jacked with extra gas," he says, squeezing lemon peel over the glittering drinks to release the oil. "Everything has a freezing point."

Using tweezers and a deft hand, Nic lays twists of pure gold across the icy slurries. Near identical, the twin spirals hang suspended in each glass.

Everything *does* have a freezing point. Memories included. Mine are kept hidden behind unscalable frozen walls. It just takes something related – another memory, a song, a scent, a death, to crack them.

For me, the thaw started with a newspaper report of a death in an ambulance as it sped through the streets of Berlin.

Arno Gatt was the leader of a gang of rich, white, alpha males – the 'Gatt Pack' – sons of prime ministers, and industry leaders – who'd bound down the front stairs of the Gold Bar in polo shirts and deck shoes as if down from the rigging of a yacht in Sydney Harbour.

Arno was 46 when his blood grew cold in the back of that Berlin ambulance. The papers said it was his damaged heart. All the gold he ingested had failed to do its job. Or maybe he ingested too much.

I wish it wasn't his death that breached the frozen walls, but it's fitting given he helped erect them. When I read of his demise, I felt a flare of triumph. Not just triumph over the death of the man, but over the symbol of everything I never was. I'd outlived the wealth model, like the mongrel outlives the thoroughbred.

I know that sounds pathetic, but I've always had a chip on my shoulder.

There is a lot that is shameful in this recount, not least the trampling over graves, or the betrayal of my own kind by starting this record about the worst years of the disease with a dead heterosexual. I'm sorry about that, but it would be fiction if I started any other way.

Deaths from the gay plague, as it was called, were completely different from other deaths. They carried a stigma combined with a terrible exhaustion that rendered us as mute as extras in a jerky silent movie directed by the Grim Reaper.

Other deaths, car accidents and standard cancers, were full colour and phonic sound.

The velvet curtain closed. It opened. It closed. It opened again. The awful film went on and on.

Sydney in those days was a different city. Emptier, darker, and more beautiful. Rents were cheap and getting the dole was easy. The unemployment office was the only place that knew your real name. Everyone else called you by your camp name. Mine was Kit, short for Kitten, because my last name was Kelly and alliteration was everything when it comes to camp names. You never picked your own. They were bestowed.

In the '80s, when you stepped down from an interstate bus, or off the overnight train at Central to begin your new life, you left the gritty realism of the past behind you on the luggage racks. The '80s was about masks and pretending and adopting a different persona that reflected the 'real' you.

I thought I left my chip behind me on those luggage racks, but it was buried too deep in my shoulder. My chip is built primarily out of hate, and envy, and a suspicion that everyone else had it far easier than me. My chip saved my life.

Arno Gatt once sloshed his drink at me and asked why there were so many gays in hospitality.

*Why are fags so servile?* is what he really meant.

“So we can tend to magnificent specimens like you,” I said, wiping his gold splatter up with a napkin.

Some of us were servile, but for me hospitality was about fulfilling another need. Renovating. Papering over my original family experience with a better one. It was this desire for something better that pulled me here. In the ‘80s this city was a magnet, Centrepoint Tower a beacon, and Oxford Street the Golden Mile.

Work, and family for me have always been linked. Family and hospitality have always been linked.