

# THE ORIGINAL SHOCK JOCK

Cartoonist Larry Pickering  
stirs up the sexism debate

By Susan Johnson



# leader of the pack

**P**rime Minister Julia Gillard's *j'accuse* parliamentary moment may be a worldwide internet sensation and internationally applauded but it did not impress one chain-smoking, bankrupt old-age pensioner from the Gold Coast who was watching it on television.

The idiot box is always on at the large rented brick house near Surfers Paradise. Larry Pickering, 70, cartoonist, failed businessman, father of 11 children aged from 51 to two years and born to five different mothers, needs to know what's happening in the world, you see.

He writes an online newspaper, *The Pickering Post*, viewed by up to 25,000 people worldwide, according to him. Once famous as *The Australian's* resident cartoonist (1974-1979) and for his annual calendar featuring politicians – male and female – with exaggerated genitalia, he recently attracted the attention of Gillard who said much the same thing about him that she did about Opposition Leader Tony Abbott's purported sexism and misogyny. It was Pickering who re-ignited old allegations online about Gillard's possible role in a mid-'90s Australian Workers'

**Like the daily newspaper cartoonist he once was, Larry Pickering paints himself as just a larrikin who picks on politicians – but others say he heads a conga line of media misogynists.**

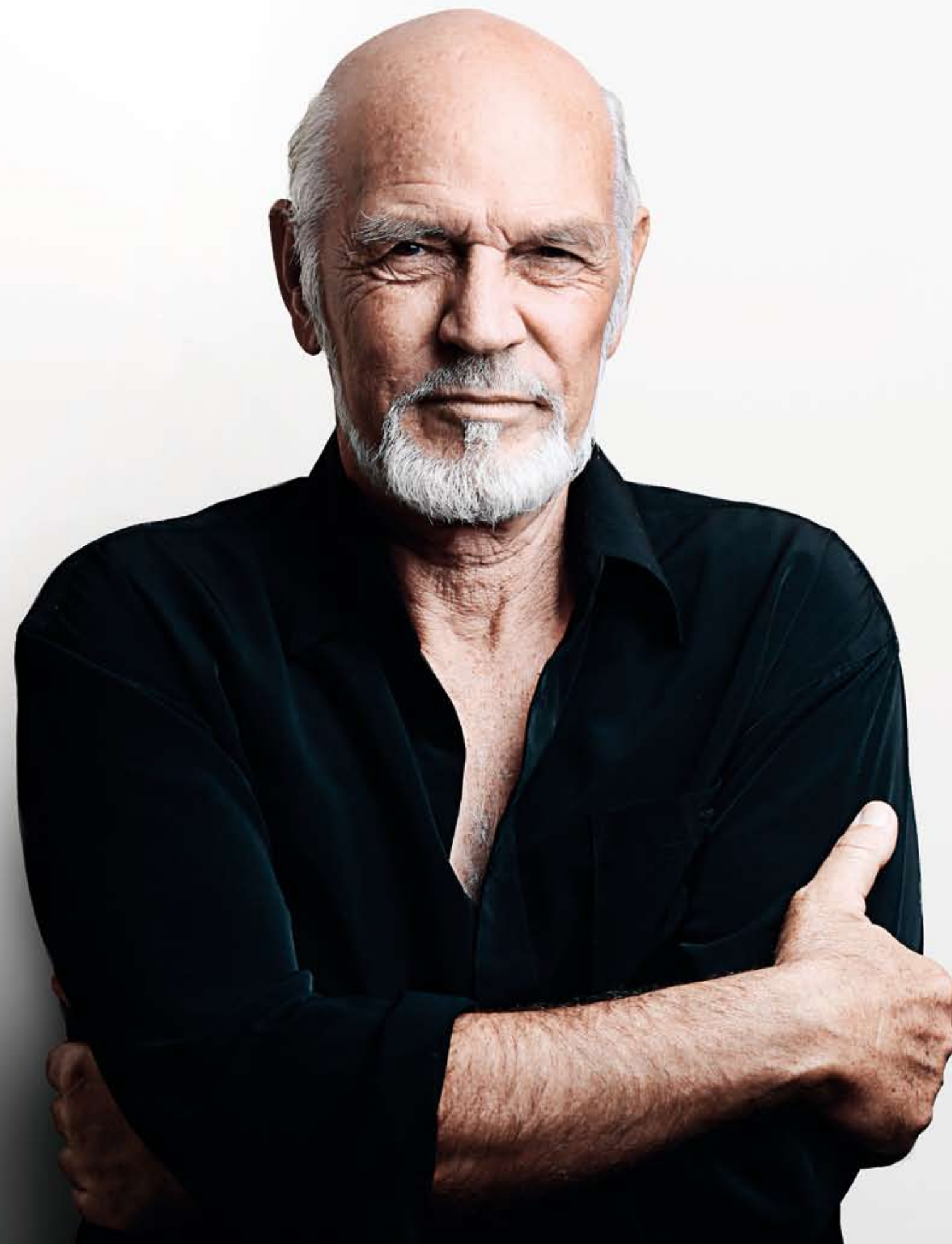
Union corruption scandal while she was a solicitor with Slater & Gordon (Gillard was then the girlfriend of an AWU official allegedly involved in corruption but never charged). When the accusations hit the mainstream press in August Pickering was briefly famous again, but perhaps not in the way he'd intended.

Gillard held a press conference, where she spoke about the "misogynist nut jobs" of the internet. She accused Pickering in particular of circulating "sexist and vicious rumours" about her, but said taking legal action for defamation

would be pointless. "Look, it's dignifying them with a status they don't deserve. Certainly Mr Pickering is bankrupt or something, so you would end up on a never-ending trail, for what purpose? Because he could lose a dozen defamation actions and he would still pursue this ... He would be propagating sexist and vicious stuff about me until the end of time."

Pickering just laughs. He reckons all this misogyny and sexist palaver is a smokescreen – last week's parliamentary performance, for example, was supposed to be a motion debating whether or not (now former) Speaker Peter Slipper should go, and Gillard turned it into yet another spray about sexism. "Mate, she put on a very strong performance, but the thing is it didn't have much to do with the motion of whether or not Slipper was a suitable character to be Speaker," he says. "This whole misogyny thing is starting to pall, these accusations are going a bit far. I couldn't care whether she's a woman or a bloke or whatever."

Besides, Pickering reckons causing trouble should be a cartoonist's job: not just getting people to sit up and take notice, but to get right up their noses. Radio shock jock Alan Jones and his comments about Gillard's father "dying of shame" ▶





## iconoclasts

have got nothing on Pickering, who regularly draws Gillard accompanied by a giant dildo. He reckons it's not that different to drawing Abbott with budgies flying out of his Speedos.

**WHILE RESEARCHING THIS PIECE I CAME ACROSS** quite a few women who questioned the value of giving Pickering any more media oxygen. "He's got an Asian wife, hasn't he? Last refuge of a particular type of man," sniffed one who possibly has not come across the same formidable Asian wives that I have.

Plenty of men bemoaned Pickering's return to the media spotlight too, including veteran business journalist Michael Pascoe, who told *Qweekend* that while Pickering was only paddling in the "relevance deprivation" of the internet, he was relatively harmless. But once Pickering's accusations about Gillard's possible role in the AWU scandal hit Australia's front pages, things changed.

"I thought, Wait a minute. This guy's a fraud and a liar. People should know the truth." Pascoe wrote a passionate and heated column for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, describing the once-famous newspaper cartoonist as an "inveterate liar, a bankrupt conman with a seedy history of fleecing the gullible of millions of dollars while not paying his own bills". Pascoe began by writing that any campaign involving Larry Pickering immediately lacked credibility and ended by claiming that "the stink of Pickering remains on the hands of those passing his material on".

Pascoe later told *Qweekend* that he found Pickering "a weird, nasty and slightly dangerous individual". Pickering says that Pascoe's hatred of him is "a personal thing". "He's an old enemy from years ago. I nearly jobbed him in a pub one night, he's such an arrogant prick."

But Pascoe claims he's never met the man. "Typical of his deluded or simply lying nature is that I don't think I've ever been in the same room as him, let alone come to blows," he said in an email.

It's safe to say that Pickering causes steam to burst forth from many ears, and not just Julia Gillard's. Pickering's numerous ex-wives and ex-girlfriends, ex-business partners and assorted lefties turn purple at the mention of his name.

When 2GB's Alan Jones made his ill-considered remarks about Gillard's recently deceased father, Pickering copped some of the flak too, getting lumped in with Jones and other older Australian men seen as rabidly right-wing and personally hostile to Gillard as a female politician. One young woman, posting on Facebook about writing to her local MP over changing her vote from Green to Labor, went as far as declaring that Gillard was a survivor of "the war against women in public and private life mounted by Jones, Pickering, Abbott and

Co. The culture Jones creates leads straight to violence against women and girls, eg [murdered ABC journalist] Jill Meagher."

Bloody typical, thunders Pickering in an email to *Qweekend* when asked for his response. "It was a stupid, nasty thing [of Jones] to say. But to suggest I or anyone else critical of Gillard is part of a movement that led to Jill Meagher's murder is reprehensible, and indicative of the low level of debate." He says in 50 years he has never seen such anger coming from both sides of politics. "There is polarisation on both sides, Susan, and people are saying things out of sheer anger that they would not normally say."

On his own Facebook page (which is often shut down because of complaints), Pickering called for a "downing of weapons and a show of respect" following John Gillard's death. He refuses to believe that Gillard meant him when she referred to the internet's "misogynist nut jobs".

During a long interview at his house at Bundall, near Surfers Paradise, that he shares with his third spouse, the aforesaid "Asian wife", Chinese-born Carol and their two-year-old son and four-year-old daughter, Pickering admits he was in danger of being hijacked by the loony rabble. "Look, I've got some pretty rabid followers out there and that's what Julia Gillard spoke about when she spent an hour goin' crook on TV. She was talking about the misogynist nut jobs; it wasn't me, because I thought that my arguments were quite rational and reasonable and well-founded.

"I mean I've never done anything misogynistic about her that I haven't done with males. Look, [Gough] Whitlam tried to sue me for puttin' Band-Aids on his dick! The thing is people don't remember that or they don't know that. [Malcolm] Fraser used to go fishing and I'd draw him putting his dick on a hook. All these things were considered funny against the male, but if I attempt to do something funny against the female, all of a sudden it's misogynistic!"

He's on a roll: "When I was a [newspaper] cartoonist everyone thought I was [of the] Left. The reason I'm called right-wing now is because a cartoonist is basically an opposition and you can only oppose what is being done. What the hell is Tony Abbott doing? He's not doing anything. But if Abbott [became PM] he'd find I'm just as vociferous towards him. It's what I do, I kick the shit out of politicians, I don't care who they are and Gillard's been the first [PM] who's been a female. What am I supposed to do? Put her in a little padded box and not touch her? She aspires to a certain position, she's got to cop the flak."

He thanks Carol for bringing us coffee and when I take the opportunity to ask her where she comes from, he gets in first: "She's Chink." Here is Larry Pickering in his element – the cartoonist



as agent provocateur, the man who loves going broke because when you're broke you're free and can do anything, the man who "only has to play with my belt" for a woman to fall pregnant. Here is the bloke who was once mates with Hawkie (as in Bob, ex-prime minister) and Singo (as in entrepreneur John Singleton) and Kerry (as in the late Packer, media magnate), the bloke who once ran as an unsuccessful candidate for the Liberal Party (for the unwinnable Canberra Labor seat of Fraser in 1974).

Here is "Laz", father of "Little Larry" among others, the former owner of boats, large houses and private helicopters he flew around Vanuatu. Here is the former multimillionaire and lover of multiple women, the man who had his first sexual experience when he was 11, seduced by a 21-year-old "fallen woman" his deeply religious Christadelphian mother ("a horrible, horrible f..king person") had brought home. His first woman, the one who broke his heart when she committed suicide, the woman he never got over.

Here's the bloke who once hired a US commando group to get back one of his kids, "kidnapped" by a runaway partner (under legal advice he did not pursue this avenue, opting for the Hague Convention more traditionally referred to in international custody disputes).



Here's the old-age pensioner, grandfather to 17 grandchildren, with his neatly trimmed silver beard, his Drum tobacco (rollies, chain-smoked) and his trademark seafaring cap, representing a dying breed of Australian male.

Pickering sometimes calls women "birds" and regularly calls both men and women "mate". He says "righto" and "so-and-so's a good root"



and drops the "g" from the end of words (as in "somethin") and the beginnings of others ("I love 'em," he responds when I ask about him having so many children. "I'd like to have another couple if I could." Carol overhears this and shoots back: "Not from me!" To which he replies: "I wasn't talking about with you, love!" They both laugh).

Here's the bloke who drew budgies flying out of Abbott's underpants. "That's highly offensive to him I s'pose because the only reason you call 'em budgie smugglers is because he's got a small dick. I mean, there's two sides to this."

Yeah, right, says the feminist woman on Facebook. Yeah, right, says the feminist author Dr Anne Summers, who gave a blistering analysis of the effects of Pickering's work in her 2012 Human Rights and Social Justice Lecture at Newcastle

University in August, entitled *Her Rights at Work: The Political Persecution of Australia's First Female Prime Minister*. Summers described Pickering's work as "obscene and indisputably sexist", arguing that if Gillard were a CEO of a company called Australia Pty Ltd, then the way in which she is attacked, vilified or demeaned on the basis of her sex would be illegal. She told the audience that "you as shareholders of Australia Pty Ltd would expect the board of directors of the company to not just pay any applicable fines and damages, but to do something about changing the culture of the company that allows this kind of behaviour to flourish. The courts can make orders to stop certain conduct and order other conduct to occur – as shareholders you could demand the directors put in place some positive actions."

In a later email to *Qweekend*, Summers argues that Pickering's "sexually based cartoons" "tap into the innate fear women have of physical and sexual assault ... a horrifying amount of the material attacking Gillard on social media sites uses sexual imagery and sexual threats. Vilification merges into implied violence."

Michael Pascoe agrees. "Pickering's always played on the idea of 'Oh, I'm just a larrikin', but that's just a cover. He's actually something much nastier."

So who is the real Larry Pickering? Who is this man who came home from school as a 14-year-old boy to find all his possessions outside the front door because his mother had kicked him out for refusing to undergo a full Christadelphian baptismal immersion, and who vowed never to see his mother again? Why do so many believe him to be disreputable and a liar? And why on earth does he have so many children?

"I don't know. I'm not a psychiatrist. I just do what I think's right," he says. The fact that a lot of other people think that what Pickering does is wrong appears not to worry him. When Pascoe – then with the Nine Network's *Business Sunday* – and other journalists from *A Current Affair* and *The Gold Coast Bulletin* investigated Pickering's business dealings and accused him of running a high-pressure cold-call racket that promised punters computer software that picked race winners (as well as posing as a salesman for the bogus scheme), Pickering did nothing, other than deny his involvement.

"It just got out of hand," he says. "I never contested any of it because if I do then I open a whole other game, you know. That's the way the internet is these days – if you say someone is homosexual, the whole world thinks you're homosexual, it just goes on and on ... that's the way life is, you just accept it, and go on."

And so, unlike the journalist from *A Current Affair* forced to doorstep Pickering and interview ►



him through the bars of his locked front gate, I find myself in the unlikely lion's den of his comfortable home office, hoping he will not touch his belt.

**LAWRENCE PICKERING, THE OLDEST OF EDGAR** and Phyllis Pickering's three sons, was born on a chook farm in Greensborough, north-east of Melbourne, before it was a suburb and was still largely farmland. He loved his father, a labourer, "a lovely guy". "He was a great guy, I always got on well with him, but [after I left home] my mother wouldn't let my dad see me because she thought I was a bad influence on him."

It was a sad thing to see, says. "He was under the spell of his wife, you know. He was a different person with me, but as soon as he got with her he became a male version of her. It was just horrible to watch." Pickering always hoped his mother would die first so he could finally spend some time with his father, but Edgar Pickering died about 15 years ago. His mother is still alive, in her early nineties, but he has no wish to see her before she dies. "I just refused to accept what I would call her criminality. She was a bad person ..."

One doesn't have to be a psychiatrist to see where Pickering gets his loathing of organised religion; he says accusations that he is racist because of his loathing of Islam, for example, are way off the mark. "It's not racist because [Islam] is not a race, it's a religion. I'm against the religion – I know some wonderful Muslim people, but the biggest problem are the clerics, the mullahs and the imams who excite the people into demonstrating, I think that's wrong. If people come to Australia they should accept us for who we are. They should have their own religion, of course they can, but they should not impose on us things that we don't necessarily want. But to call that racist, that's an easy tag, to get you out of avoiding logic."

Before he left home, Pickering's sexual appetite was already legendary. He reckons he slept with every girl his mother brought home for safe-keeping, not realising she harboured a viper in the nest. "My mother had always wanted a girl and so she brought all these broken girls into the family and supposedly she was going to convert them to her religion. But they never really converted and I had usually made love to them before she got a chance anyway."

As might be expected, a girl finally got pregnant, but this time it wasn't one of his mother's fallen girls but a good girl, Carmel, the daughter of another Christadelphian family, a girl he'd known all his life, a girl from a "good" family well-known to his own. It was a scandal. "My mother tried to get the baby



Paper tiger ... Pickering at *The Australian* in 1979; (below) a more recent cartoon for his website.

**He was suddenly famous, "the highest-paid journo in Australia ... just massive money."**



aborted; in those days you couldn't have a baby out of wedlock, it was a disgrace." She tried to stop them getting married, too, refusing to sign the papers allowing them to wed as they were both under 21. He took the matter to a solicitor and the couple were allowed to keep the baby and get married. He was 19 when Toni Leanne was born, the first of the six children he had with his first wife.

He's seen his mother only once since, in all those intervening years, when he went back to Victoria about ten years ago for his brother's funeral (the second son, Peter, committed suicide and the youngest, Kirwan, also known as Kris, is a former journalist who lives on the Gold Coast and who recently unsuccessfully contested a seat as an Independent on the Gold Coast Council).

"There was only one of the three boys who

turned out religious and he necked himself, so that shows you what good religion is to anyone. It turned out that he [Peter] was pretending to be someone he wasn't, and he couldn't live with it, you know. He was supposed to be the epitome of the great religious person – he was an elder brethren or brother or something within the religion, but I had all these women writing to me sayin', 'Your brother's a good root' and all this sort of stuff."

Pickering started questioning religion when he was as young as eight. "I stopped arguing about it [at home] because I was gettin' nowhere." Instead, he started his lifelong apprenticeship to opposition and individuality.

He claims not to have had a moment's fear when he was kicked out of home. "No, no, I was never lonely, or frightened. I was a pretty big boy and I grew up pretty quick. When I was forced to leave home I had to go to work because I wouldn't have survived otherwise. I had to pretend I was 18 to get a job; I looked 18 and within three weeks of getting a job on the Victorian Railways I was put in charge of a gang."

He lived in South Melbourne, in a room for which he paid ten shillings a week. He remembers watching the Olympic Games on a black-and-white television in the communal lounge. It must have been 1956, before the '60s anyway, before the sexual revolution, before Woodstock, before women's lib. He began his media career as a proofreader at Melbourne's now defunct *Herald and Weekly Times*. He and Carmel had a second child, then a third, in quick succession (he technically remained married to her for 36 years until her death in 1996, even though they lived apart and he had children with other women). But soon his "bitch of a mother" started interfering again.

"When it was clear my mother was going to make it hard for me, getting on the phone to my kids and telling them that Daddy was going to go to hell and all this sort of stuff, I took the kids and put 'em in the car and went straight to Canberra and got a job on *The Canberra Times*."

It was where he started cartooning, in 1968. "I put the cartoons up in the men's toilets each day so that the editor would have to see them. Eventually he came and said, 'Look, do one for the paper'. Pickering's work proved so successful that he was later poached by *The Sydney Morning Herald*. But the *SMH* started changing his captions, which Pickering did not like one bit, so he marched into the editor's office. "I said, 'You wouldn't do that with a political columnist, would you? Would you change what he's saying, with a signature on the bottom or a byline on top of it?' That was their attitude, that a cartoonist was a malleable piece that you could make fit here or there. That wasn't me, and it was never going to be me."

So, when the call came from "Rupert", he was ready (not Rupert himself, mind, one of his ►

minions, but Pickering tells the story as if Rupert Murdoch called him personally). Anyway, there he was, suddenly famous, “the highest-paid journo in Australia” by a long shot. “Just massive money ... and they gave me freedom.”

He was also allowed to go out on long boozy lunches and fondly recalls the time he got drunk at lunch, having already done his cartoon, but not having yet thought of a line for it. “I was just so pissed I couldn’t think of a line so I wrote on the bottom of it, ‘Been out for lunch, smashed, the best line wins a can of Foster’s.’ They got thousands of suggestions.”

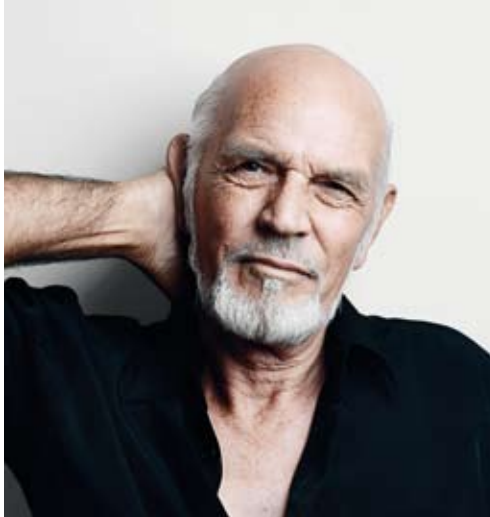
His contract was for five years and when it came to an end he wasn’t up to signing another. “I was spent, the pressure was just [enormous]. I mean, some people can get away with doing it half-heartedly, but I didn’t want to do that, so I thought, well, I’ll leave it at the top and go.”

By then he was living with a woman called Beverley and their son in Sydney, visiting his other family in Canberra on the weekends. After Beverley came another woman, “Tuppy”, and another son, then the Englishwoman who asked him to marry her so that she could get residency (Carmel had died by then, so he did). This was the ex who later fled the country with their daughter.

Carol is his third wife, the one he calls his “lucky last” and to whom he has been married seven years, the wife who comes from a wealthy Chinese family and who studied business management in Adelaide before she met Pickering through his Hong Kong business. When I ask her about the accusation that her husband is a misogynist, Carol asks him to define the term “misogynist” and laughs when it is explained. “Not at all,” she says. “He always respects me.” She thinks, too, that all the stories accusing him of improper business dealings are hokum. “There’s always two parts to any story. Most of my friends they know me and they know what’s going on. When people say, ‘Oh, I saw Larry on TV’, I talk to them ...”

“Yeah,” says Pickering, interrupting. “I was supposed to have ripped millions off people or something. What a joke! The story originally came from one of my exes, it was just so much garbage. I mean if I’ve got all this stolen money she thinks I’ve got, she should go straight to Centrelink and tell ’em. She made me bankrupt, I didn’t have the money she thought I had, so she made me bankrupt.”

He cannot explain why so many of his relationships sour so violently, only that it usually begins over something small. With one of his exes it came down to a fight about a dog – he thought the dog was dangerous to have around a baby, so he issued an ultimatum, it’s me or the dog. She chose the dog.



Easy come, easy go ...  
Two years after losing  
\$17 million in the 1987  
sharemarket crash,  
Pickering moved all his  
assets (including his  
helicopter, below) to  
a tax haven in Vanuatu.

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**SO WHAT HAS HE BEEN DOING IN THE ALMOST-** 40 years since his heady days as Australia’s most infamous cartoonist, when he posed for nude centrefolds in *Cleo* and hobnobbed with the rich and famous? “Oh, muckin’ around. I’ve gone broke about three times, you know, I’ve just done everything. Goin’ broke doesn’t worry me, I love it, because all of a sudden it gives you a clean slate, you can do anythin’ when you’re broke.

“When you’re rich you’re confined to your solicitors, your accountants and your managers, and you’ve got to support them, you can’t just walk away, they’ve got families.” He says he lost “\$17 million or somethin’, overnight” in the ’87 sharemarket crash. He’d built up a publishing business in Sydney (grown out of

his successful calendars, depicting Australian and world political figures – men and women – in various states of undress) and sold the business to his mate Kerry Packer. “I put the money in shares and two weeks later I’d lost the lot. So, you know, ups and downs; it’s just my life, but I wouldn’t be dead for quids, or change anything.”

He moved from Sydney to the Gold Coast after the crash. “I remember saying to Carmel at the time, ‘Just give me another couple of years and I’ll buy you another house’ – ‘cause she lost everything – and within two years I did buy her another house.” Indeed, within two years he had also moved to Vanuatu with his new partner, Tuppy, “because of some tax thing which allows you to take your assets there”. So he flew his helicopter over and sailed his boats across and lived a high old life until “some crooked accountants over there set about stealin’ the lot, which they did”. He came back to the Coast, where it is alleged he continued his involvement with the so-called betting scam and a Hong Kong-based sports trading company which subsequently folded. (He has always enjoyed horse-racing and golf along with his women.)

“What I do is set up a company, do the promotion, do the literature, the brochures or whatever, get it started – I used to do it for \$10,500 – and then I walk away.” He claims this is how his name began to be associated with scam companies. “From what I understand happened there was this bloke, these people selling software, right? And apparently it didn’t work; well, some people said it worked and other people said there was a problem with it. There was this one bloke in Sydney who took the company to court on seven separate occasions and still lost. Not my company, but a company I’d set up ... it just went on and on from there because he knew he could get publicity if he could associate me with the company.”

Pickering says he has had no visits from the police, the Fraud Squad, or even a phone call. “It’s all garbage, mate, it stems from just one thing built on another and then another ... I mean, it doesn’t worry me, all that crap. People who know me know the truth.”

When *Qweekend* contacted the Queensland Police to ask about the progress of the matter, a spokesperson said it “was still under review”. Pickering just wishes the whole thing would go away. But more fervently he wishes the Gillard thing would go away, along with all the bleating feminists. (“Anne [Summers] seems a bitter woman with a chip on each shoulder searching for approval. Her audience died long ago.”)

He’s getting a bit sick of it, to tell the truth. “I just wish that the whole Gillard government would go away so that I can settle down and go back to playing golf.” ■