

'I was not the Tony Soprano of Brisbane'

Chris Barrett
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The Fitzgerald Inquiry figure Antonio Bellino has dismissed suggestions he was ever the Tony Soprano of Brisbane, claiming that the mafia has never had a foothold in the city.

Mr Bellino was questioned during the inquiry into illegal gambling, prostitution and police corruption but never charged, unlike his brother Geraldo who was jailed in 1991 for paying bribes of \$17,000 a month to police as part of the scheme known as The Joke.



Antonio Bellino.

The owner of Fortitude Valley clubs the Roxy which is now the Arena and the Beat in the years leading up to the inquiry and before that the proprietor of the notorious Pinnochios and the World By Night strip club, Mr Bellino claims in a new book that his reputation and livelihood were ruined unfairly by his appearance before Tony Fitzgerald QC.

"That killed me. I never ever had clearance from the Fitzgerald Inquiry yet," he told brisbanetimes.com.au at the launch of his memoir *Time for Truth* last night.

"My family were bullied. I had three houses, a block of land at Maleny, 10-and-a-half acres on the waterfront at Albert River, a unit down the (Gold) Coast. I lost all that."

He now lives in the New Farm home he bought from his mother.

By association with his convicted brother Geraldo and his partner Vic Conte, who was also jailed in the aftermath of Fitzgerald, Mr Bellino said he had been wrongly tagged as the head of a Bellino family organised crime syndicate.

He had been named in the inquiry's terms of reference as one of five people of interest allegedly involved in paying for police protection.

The inquiry would become one of the most stunning episodes in the state's history, ultimately ending Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen's 19-year premiership and landing police officers -

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including the Commissioner Terry Lewis - behind bars.

Mr Bellino, however, has always denied any knowledge of illegal gaming rooms at the clubs he owned and laughs off suggestions he was a mob boss, saying he took "the other road" to his brother Geraldo, who along with Conte were part-owners in the Beat.

"There is no mafia in Brisbane because I stopped it," he said.

"Abe Saffron and his bodyguards came up from Sydney (in the early 1970s) to try and take over business ... it was just before the Whiskey Au Go Go (fire).

"I said no and they respected me. I was very feared in those days. I wasn't mucking around.

"Maybe because I was in the nightclub business it was that image people respected me."

He admitted the use of standover tactics had fuelled his reputation on the streets but claimed yesterday he did not like to use them.

"I was (using them) but I didn't like the idea because I knew that I would have to pay too in the end," he said.

Mr Bellino also uses his book to criticise the inquiry's failure to focus on the prevalence of the illicit drug trade in Brisbane.

"The Valley is getting killed with drugs," said Mr Bellino, who has for the past 15 years owned and operated the restaurant Mellino's on Brunswick Street.

"I didn't know anything about the drugs but they were around.

"I think that Fitzgerald himself, his hands were tied. He couldn't do what he wanted to do."

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