

Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Anton Veenstra

Interviewer: John Witte

Date: 24 July 2010

Location of interview: Stanley Street, Tempe, NSW

Reason for interview: Project 40

Restrictions: None



Time	Summary	Keywords
	TAPE 1	
0-47	Born Cowra Refugee Internment Camp 1951 – father ex-Dutch army in Indonesia, mother ex-internment camp in northern Yugoslavia at end of WWII. Family moved to camp near Pitt Town NSW – became citizens.	Cowra Refugee Internment Camp; Pitt Town;
3-05	Used information from this period in tapestry for Blake Prize.	Blake Prize;
4-08	Family moved to Mackay – grew up in Marian, 20km inland from Mackay.	Mackay; Marian;
4-40	Talks about social organisation in Marian – kanakas, migrants, settled Maltese & Italian farmers and Anglos.	Marian;
6-56	Mother Catholic from Slovenia – information from European relatives was positive about Tito’s Yugoslavia.	Slovenia; Roman Catholic;
7-47	End Tape 1	
	TAPE 2	
0-13	Mother last of family to adapt to new situation – weak English language.	
0-52	German spoken at home.	
1-45	Young Irish priest – 2 nd in command in parish – weightlifter – became predatory on altar boys – priest fled when Anton’s father discovered his abusive behaviour.	
2-10	As a pre-teenager wanted to become a priest – taken seriously by local Catholic hierarchy – led to Anton going on a scholarship to a boarding school attached to a seminary at Douglas Park near Sydney for 2 years.	Douglas Park Seminary;
2-50	Identifies as “gay even then” – sees the 1 st Year seminarians as being very sexual in their passion for the liturgy.	
3-48	The boarding experience was a way of “neutralising the experience of this paedophile priest and of reviving the ...vocation”.	
4-10	Moved to a grammar school in Toowoomba – “hateful” because other kids were “poncy, rich”. Scholarship paid fees – uniforms etc had to be paid by father.	Toowoomba;
5-10	Realises that his gayness “melted” the religious vocation. Father was pleased that Anton no longer wanted to be a priest.	
5-42	Father was an orphan raised in an orphanage – entered Dutch army to escape – religion nominally Lutheran.	Lutheran;

6-06	Slovenia had been scene of strife between Catholics & Lutherans – this carried over into parents’ relationship even though father was a nominal Catholic.	
7-04	Quality of initial education became clear when returned to local high school.	
8-08	Local priest who had organised scholarships was a correspondent of Franco. He wrote weekly & gave updates from the pulpit every Sunday. B.A. Santamaria was (broadcasting from Brisbane) local representative of anti-communists “we must protect Catholicism from the forces of Communism. The Iron Curtain seeks to destroy Catholicism in Europe. Blah, Blah Blah.”	General Franco; B.A. Santamaria; Iron Curtain;
8-40	Father was best buddy of the priest. Anton thought of father as a leftie – but he was pro-Santamaria. Mother had no politics.	
9-30	School subjects – good at maths, good visually. Drawings on blackboards for nuns’ birthdays was a creative outlet.	
10-34	High School – maths, physics, chemistry still good by end of HS – liked language, writing poetry, English History, French.	
11-30	Had scholarship mid-HS from local mill. – Got to University on a Commonwealth scholarship – 3year Bachelor degree + 1 Year Diploma of Education.	James Cook University; Townsville;
11-55	Started in Townsville – did 2 years.	Townsville;
12-09	Townsville a “difficult city – more spaced-out than Mackay culture was”. Car culture was paramount.	
12-31	He lived on campus in college hall. Close to Lavarack Barracks where conscripts were being trained for Vietnam – this is in ‘67-‘68-‘69.	Vietnam War; Lavarack Barracks; Townsville;
13-22	In 2 nd year he sets up household with other “blokes”.	
13-44	He had access to town - there was a gay bar.	
14-00	Anton went to Sydney at the end of 1 st year – stayed at YMCA – met a contact from Mackay who became 1 st adult sexual partner	YMCA Sydney;
14-52	The “Y being the crossroads of Sydney gay life at the time” – taken to Chez Ivy.	Chez Ivy;
15-08	Enzo’s opposite Paddington Town Hall.	Enzo’s;
15-18	Places in the Cross – Carousel, Apollo Pancake place (the Adonis Pancake Parlour – correction Edd Ashmore).	Carousel; Adonis Pancake Parlour;
15-40	The Rex, Bottoms-up Bar at the back of the Rex, the Menzies “some bar at the back of the Menzies, at Wynyard”. Note: the Marble Bar was in the Adams Tattersall’s Hotel in Pitt Street, not the Menzies at Wynyard; [the Marble Bar was created in the 1893 renovations] Garry Wotherspoon 16/8/11	Rex Bottoms-up Bar; Menzies;
16-05	John Lonie (correction Garry Wotherspoon 16/8/11) and Sumner Lock Elliot both mention it. The Marble Bar at Adams Hotel in Pitt Street. Never went to Marble Bar.	John Lonie; Sumner Lock Elliot; Marble Bar;

16-25	He found macho culture scary.	
16-45	While at HS, went tobacco picking at Mareeba – incident with man who “was both sides of the fence” & his friend who was trying to keep him on the straight & narrow.	Mareeba;
17-25	He found pub patrons older – had problem in Townsville with older men who “talked to you like you were a dumb girl”. Lance (Gowland) also did this.	Townsville; Lance Gowland;
18-30	He thinks this was a “rapist culture” – older guys with younger men (40 y.o. with 20 y.o.) – reflecting a hetero norm with older person telling younger what to do. Didn’t like this attitude – “first stirrings of independence”.	
19-30	He can’t remember exactly when he was drafted into armed forces – at end of 1 st year or beginning of 2 nd year at Uni. Study was boring in 2 nd year.	
19-40	He transferred to Macquarie Uni for 3 rd year of study.	Macquarie University;
20-15	Lived in Helen St, Lane Cove household. Group included Anglo-Australian with Dutch-Indonesian girlfriend, son of a Hong Kong businessman, “really good-looking” son of farmer, & oldest guy was friend of politico-ratbag element at Macquarie who were anti-Vietnam war, lefties with political-philosophical backgrounds “so they could do the talk” – used marijuana a lot.	Lane Cove; Macquarie University; Anti-Vietnam war movement; Marijuana;
22-40	He went to a couple of anti-Vietnam war demonstrations.	Anti-Vietnam war movement; Demonstrations;
22-47	Simon Townsend burnt his draft card at one of these.	Simon Townsend;
23-20	He took draft papers to demo leaders & was told to get legal representation.	
23-40	Anton wrote to [draft board] bureaucracy several times telling them he had moved from Sydney back to Mackay leading to delays because of bureaucratic confusion – Whitlam govt’s failure to enforce law – had medical examination & interview – said “I don’t think I’m emotionally compatible with the idea of going to Vietnam” – heard no more from draft;	Vietnam draft;
25-28	His first Gay Lib party was in Elizabeth Bay – music was Bowie’s “Ziggy Stardust”	Gay Liberation; David Bowie; Elizabeth Bay;
26-01	With Rod had written (article on opera) to CAMP (the magazine/journal) to provoke some discussion – response from Lex Watson about it asking if they were “drama queens”.	CAMP; Lex Watson; Rod Byatt;
27-02	He didn’t know anyone [in gay movement] at Macquarie – invited to go to hear Dennis Altman talk – didn’t know what Altman was to speak on – much mutual coming-out in the audience – realises many friends at uni are gay – event was radicalising.	Dennis Altman; Macquarie University;
30-29	He had to repeat final year at Uni. – marijuana was a part of the problem – some help with work from French lecturer.	

31-18	Anton decides to go to Sydney Uni to do Dip. Ed. - recognises that he didn't have the right stuff to be a teacher at that time	Sydney University;
32-06	He went to a couple of meetings of Gay Liberation at 33A Glebe Point Rd it was the one with the "bright blue kitchen".	33a Glebe Point Rd; Gay Liberation;
32-46	He lived in the back bedroom probably at 33A – but maybe it was 376 Cleveland St.	376 Cleveland St;
33-30	Lance (Gowland) lived upstairs – Jeremy Fisher was a resident in one of the houses (Correction by Anton 8/06/11 "first Gay Lib house was 67 Glebe Point Road, it had rooms at back and upstairs, I lived in an inner room on the ground floor. Yes, Lance was upstairs and Jeremy at the back upstairs. Bob Gould rented a room and left the shower pilot light on, causing a fire.) Jeremy Fisher was given a bad time by the firemen provoking a suicide attempt he believes.	Jeremy Fisher; John Gould; Lance Gowland;
34-28	They had trouble from youths attending next-door pinball parlour – Rod (Byatt) was attacked – Anton had to call police. (Correction by Anton 8/6/11 "attack by youths from pinball parlour at 33A Glebe Point Road)	Rod Byatt;
35-10	Lance Gowland and Ron Austin were living there Anton was seeing Rod Byatt who lived in a house including Richard Wilson in Harris St Ultimo.	Ron Austin; Lance Gowland; Richard Wilson;
35-57	Glebe house was very grotty - moving to Cleveland St was "at Ron's behest" – Ron saw Cleveland St as " a way of structuring his relationship with Lance...he saw Lance as the great love of his life"	Ron Austin;
37-05	Ron & Lance were older – in their 40s – Ron didn't like a lot of the counter-culture of the time.	Ron Austin; Lance Gowland;
38-05	Anton remembers planning meetings at a house off Glebe Point Rd – people designing posters – Pam Stein was in that group – younger people often viewed with suspicion.	Pam Stein;
38-50	Dennis Freaney spoke of Anton as a "possible ASIO plant" – Anton apparently rootless and "not of the time".	Dennis Freaney; ASIO;
40-25	He sees reason for some paranoia as some activities were not legal, eg posterings.	
40-46	At this time young people were radicalising themselves – some were from wealthy backgrounds e.g. Richard Wilson was "the son of an iron ore magnate from Wollongong".	Richard Wilson; Wollongong;
44-01	Mention of strategies young Gay Lib was using – the "zap". Anton comments on the political actions of the movement. He was concerned that phoniness and staginess was acceptable. A political rhetoric which was in part insincere. Anton wanted to do something which was heartfelt.	the Zap; Gay Liberation;
45-39	Mark Matheson known as Lyndon (correction Garry Wotherspoon 16/8/11) at the time was involved in zap.	Mark Matheson;

45-57	Richard Wilson proposed a zap of the City Circle train system – a “love-in” – people cuddling on the train - first time he gets together with Rod & beginning of relationship.	Richard Wilsons; City Circle;
48-45	He went to the 2nd Minto Conference. Mentions a consciousness raising session with Rod Byatt and Richard Wilson, drugs, music, face painting. An older Austrian/German man spoke about the causes of homosexuality and a young lesbian rose and said she wasn’t going to listen to him. Pam Stein was there. He talks about lesbian influences/involvement in Gay Liberation.	Second Minto Conference; Rod Byatt; Richard Wilson; Pam Stein;
53:08	At Glebe Point Road, perhaps Pam Stein came in and said “you’re just a bunch of sexist bastards. You’ve done no work about feminism. You’ve got no idea what we are going through. How can we trust you. How can we have anything to do with you when you haven’t done anything?” (Clarification by Anton 8/6/11 – Stein asked us to read Greer and Shulamith Firestone, no one did. Thus her outburst).	Pam Stein
54:00	At the above incident at the conference, another woman got up and read excerpts from the Solanas manifesto (SCUM) after the other woman had walked out.	Valerie Solanas;
54:41	He believes that after this incident, Rod and he moved in together.	
55-50	Before 1978 march, Lance, Ron etc were at the house – suggestions that a march not approved by police might become problematic – Rod & A decided not to attend.	1978 Mardi Gras;
56-58	Anton was involved in Phone-a-Friend and talks about his impressions of Ron Austin.	Phone-a-Friend; Ron Austin;
58-27	While in Gay Lib there was a Saturday night dance thing – a friend of Ron’s, Brian Earl, made caftans for people. They would sit at a table as you went into the dance.	Ron Austin; Brian Earl;
59-30	Impressions of Phone-a-Friend. It was often difficult work. There was no training and you’d get abusive calls from poofter bashers and sees it as being about personal liberation & helping other people.	Phone-a-Friend;
1-02-05	His relationship with Rod was seen as permanent & it contrasted to the relationships within Gay Lib movement being “polymorphous perverse”. Dennis Altman’s view of monogamy as aping heterosexual norms.	Gay Liberation;
1-05-07	Attended as a couple of early Mardi Gras parties at Paddington Town Hall.	Mardi Gras parties;
1-06-05	First Mardi Gras seen as organised for different people to get different things from the same event – e.g. Ron & Lance very different in terms of their politics – feels that these differences need to be acknowledged.	Mardi Gras;
1-07-15	Impact of AIDS. Anton was working as a telephone operator. Worked beside Bernie Woodruff who knew he had virus.	Bernie Woodruff;

	Mentions reactions of workmates when he visited Bernie. The Quilt has panel from telephone exchange. He notes that group of friends for sick people did become much smaller as they got sicker.	International Telephone exchange; AIDS;
1:09:55	Views about the Quilt project in Sydney.	Quilt;
1:11:40	Anton talks about his impression of the influx of Melbourne people, like David McDiarmid taking over the Centre and acted like a clique. Paul Foss was involved.	David McDiarmid; Paul Foss; Melbourne;
1:14:00	Was Gay Lib a creative environment? He remembers an illustrated version of the Doris Day song lyrics, "Secret Love" created by David. But what he did "did not immediately change the cultural milieu of that meeting place".	David McDiarmid;
1:15:20	There were attempts to inject some cultural activity into the Centre and make it a home – e.g. life drawing group with male nude – trying to make the Centre a home, not just a meeting place – activity seen as bourgeois by young radicals. Ron and Lance were also involved in this.	Ron Austin, Lance Gowland;
1:17:00	Observations of Lance Gowland. He and Lance had a sexual relationship "but Lance had to keep moving on. He did not have a very articulated way of moving on. It was like one day it was happening and one day you just didn't exist. And we all copped it. And it was Lance growing. That was Lance working out who he was and what he was. And God help us!"	Lance Gowland;
1:17:43	He recalls some elements of Maoist thought appearing e.g. self-criticism.	Maoism
1:20:27	Anton's artistic practice. He had been writing poetry in the early 70s and poems appeared in CAMP Ink. In 1976 at a Teachers College camp at Minto he saw tapestry weaving and begun doing tapestry – travelled through Europe, Greece, Egypt, Turkey - worked in Holland for a month or so – wanted to learn tapestry at Dutch Polytechnic.	CAMP Ink;
1:24:55	He returned to Sydney to Rod and back at Telstra.	Telstra;
1:25:16	'98-'99 craft contribution to Mardi Gras at Customs House – 2 exhibitions "Age of Consent" & "Material Boys Unzipped" – Bruce James, (gay) arts writer for SMH reviewed exhibition – James wrote an important article called "What is Gay Art Anyway?" from the "Material Boys Unzipped" show.	Mardi Gras exhibition; Age of Consent; Material Boys Unzipped; Bruce James;
1:27:48	AGNSW unable to deal with gay art – "Stupid as a Painter" by Juan Davila unable to be shown – generally no gay art scene as such.	Art Gallery of NSW; Juan Davila;
1:28:30	Poster art was the go in the '70s – at Tin Sheds Gallery. Lesbians also showed at the Watters exhibition.	Poster art; Tin Sheds Gallery; Watters exhibition;
1:29:40	Burlesque an important expression of gay life. Sylvia and the Synthetics seen a couple of times at the Strand. He sees drag as a bit separatist in a way.	Burlesque; Sylvia and the Synthetics;

1:30-25	Chez Ivy recalled as place of very raw drag talent contests.	Chez Ivy;
	TAPE 3	
0:05	End of Sydney Teachers' College, tapestry becomes important.	Sydney Teachers' College;
0:30	Career slowly develops. He was overseas for 9 months – returns to Telstra work and was weaving tapestries part time	Telstra;
1:05	2 people became important. - Les Rashleigh running Sydney Textile Museum in Australia St., Camperdown.	Les Rashleigh; Sydney Textile Museum;
1:17	Ken editor of Arts & Crafts International magazine.	Arts & Crafts International;
1:36	1983 took part in Crafts Expo at Centrepoint – organised by Craft Australia.	
2:02	1984 visit from Les Rashleigh to studio - working on collage based on Jimmy Somerville clip of "Smalltown Boy" – tapestry called "The Diver" – won acquisitive Award prize in show in 1984 – Les Rashleigh insisted that the catalogue entry not have any reference to gay issues.	Les Rashleigh; Jimmy Somerville;
3:45	He divides his work between that which is overtly gay political & craft works that are shown in a way where politics is not an issue – women viewers express a liking for work but "not interested in the gay stuff".	
4:20	2000 return to COFA for Masters degree – combined studio research work – about family & migration to Australia	COFA;
5:18	Series of exhibitions including Blake Prize in 2007 & Phoenix Prize in Canberra (ACT equivalent of the Blake) – tries to raise issues that are philosophical, ethical, religious and gay culture.	Blake Prize; Phoenix Prize;
6:00	Graphic image about execution of 2 young gay boys in Iran – original image provided by Peter Tatchell.	Peter Tatchell;
7:05	Paedophilia issue – made a work referencing that part of own life – this at the end of a 10 year period during which he worked to finally have church acknowledge the activities of the priest who had abused him in early '60s.	Paedophilia;
7:50	His latest work is about how his generation sees & responds to the AIDS epidemic of the '80s & '90s.	AIDS
8:42	He sees self as a "guilty, healthy survivor" – new work based on El Greco image of [Saint] Sebastian from the Prado in Madrid – sees El Greco as a closeted gay artist dealing with the Spanish Inquisition.	El Greco;
9:50	He dislikes Pierre et Gilles artistic treatment of Christian hagiography – kitsch.	Pierre et Gilles
10:57	He made an image of St. Sebastian using a button collage.	
12:09	He was teaching – demonstrating tapestry - in ANU Canberra in 2005 for a year.	ANU;

12·50	He is in a show (Hands On 2010) curated by Cash Brown (Correction by Anton 8/6/11) at Hazelhurst Gallery at Gynea – work recognises the feminist ethic learnt from his mother.	Hazelhurst Gallery; Gynea;
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