

John Witte interviewing Ron Austin born 1929, Maitland at his home on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2004 concerning his life and gay activism. This interview is part of the Pride History Project Oral History Project on the lives of gay activists in Sydney



Time	Subjects	Proper Names
	<b>Tape 1 Side A</b>	
000	Outlines growing up in Maitland, going to school, his first job and entering a monastery from 16 years to 21 years	Maitland
020	Feeling alone, and different, as eldest child, active sexually in pre- and adolescence, parents steering him toward heterosexuality. Need to find identity led to monastic life. Resolution to falling in love in monastery.	
105	Pressures to conform in the real world. Work in milk business. Looked for work, then went to art school and further training in Sydney. Working with children in leisure time activities.	
122	Pressures to conform to heterosexual norm - there was no knowledge of homosexuality. He could not have said he was gay because he did not know what that was. Sense of doing the "right thing".	
176	Movement with after school care involvement with lots of people including amateur theatre groups. Support system. One person he was close to. Loneliness was a sense of looking for "me". The world was heterosexual, no positive models. Just lived with the loneliness "I don't belong". Later recognition what the loneliness was all about then getting on with who you really are. It took a long time from a 25 yo to a 35 yo.	
252	Describes doing the beats. No sense of guilt. Dozens of men. Social gathering of people. Apprehension of police harassment.	North Sydney Beats
285	Describes two incidents at beats, one where he was arrested by agent provocateur and went to court alone. The second when he was robbed and beaten up, aged about 30.	
	<b>Tape 1 Side B</b>	
000	Court case continued. Kept it to himself. Shame.	
015	He says that prevailing messages about homosexuals in media was negative and gave example of arrests of a gay group – the yellow sox brigade in Newcastle - for meeting in each others houses.	Yellow sox brigade Newcastle
039	He describes a witchhunt in early days of the Gay	Sydney Morning

	Movement of gay men in Newcastle and the actions of the SMH in printing their names.	Herald Gay Movement
<b>Time</b>	<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Proper Names</b>
050	Names gay venues. Heard on grapevine – the Purple onion, Chez Ivy, bar at Rex Hotel he knew of but didn't go to them. Term used to describe was "camp" or "homosexual" – no other word. Camp was seen as a bit of a put down.	Purple Onion, Chez Ivy The Rex Hotel, the term Camp.
077	Describes becoming involved in activism through word of mouth on the beat.	CAMP Sydney Morning Herald
098	Describes his first meeting at CAMP at the Old Bachelor Residence beside the Balmain Fire Station in Darling Street which was an EGM about drawing up a constitution. Lex Watson present. Dennis Altman draws up a constitution.	CAMP EGM Lex Watson Dennis Altmann Darling Street meeting place
127	Describes feelings after the meeting and then going to Saturday night functions. There he met people like Brian Earl. Had to learn what it was to be gay.	Brian Earl
147	Chris Stahl was asked if he could establish a volunteer phone counselling service and Ron joined. He became political.	Chris Stahl
163	Discusses the idea that counselling was political. Through hearing calls from people ringing up becomes committed to a change in the law, attitudes and societal values. Others were showing him that to change things you had to be political. He was in his 40's.	
208	Other activities of CAMP. Lobbying those parliamentarians. Actions Group grew out of Counselling experience. Demonstrations.	Actions Group
236	Speaks about experiences in public speaking with tertiary groups, especially welfare, mental health, in TAFE Colleges, Apex, Rotarians. People wanted to know what Homosexuality was all about. He provides examples at Bankstown TAFE and at a Milperra Welfare Certificate Course with Margaret Sargent. Also worked with Gail Hewison on this public speaking work.	Margaret Sargent Ron Fenwick Gail Hewison
349	Michael Clohesy sacking from his position in a school at Meadowbank. Demonstration outside St Mary's	Michael Clohesy's sacking
	<b>Tape 2 Side A</b>	
000	Assesses importance of Bonsall's sacking as Secretary of St Clements Anglican Church Mosman and the subsequent demonstration.	Peter Bonsall- Boone St Clements Mosman Peter De Waal Gaby Antolovich

		"Chequerboard"
<b>Time</b>	<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Proper Names</b>
030	Describes demonstration against Michael Clohesy's sacking in 1975/76 outside St Marys.	
038	Mentions demonstration against aversion therapy at UNSW. The professor was claiming success.	Professor McConaughy
048	Describes demonstration against aversion therapy at Rozelle Psychiatric Hospital.	
080	Describes the CAMP Counselling service. He defends decision of gays counselling gays. Brian Earl and he set up a new members night on Fridays night. Provides an example of a traumatised caller who called and then came to the Centre.	Brian Earl
138	Explains the importance of Education through Art Movement and CAMP to his knowledge of the world and a number of people important for him in this regard.	Education through Art movement Herbert Read Mary Matheson Camp Women's Association
197	Describe experiences giving evidence to Royal Commission into Human Relationships. Archbishop of Brisbane, Anne Deveson, and Elizabeth Evatt tribunalists. Intervention by the Catholic church to stop CAMP giving evidence. QC Lusher represented the Catholic Hierarchy. Terms of reference did include homosexuals.	Royal Commission into Human Relationships Archbishop of Brisbane, Anne Deveson, Elizabeth Evatt Catholic Hierarchy of Sydney QC Lusher
229	Royal Commission into NSW Police. They gave evidence. Lusher was there too.	Michael Clohesy Peter de Waal Royal Commission into NSW Police QC Lusher
242	Outlines an argument to counter negative stereotypes about transitory gay relationships.	
302	Corrects interviewer regarding the visit of Mary Whitehouse and describes an incident at the ABC studios earlier in 1978.	Mary Whitehouse, Frida Brown
315	Describes the process by which the idea of a Mardi Gras was hatched. Celebration in 1978 on Saturday was to be the 10 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stonewall. Request from ?Gaysoc for CAMP would participate. He was part of a circle of friends involved in the actions group in CAMP. He had the idea of a celebration of gays of	Stonewall Gaysoc Kym Skinner Dr Jim Walker Lance Gowland Margaret McMann Actions Group

	themselves. At night, no slogans, no politics. Margaret said “you mean a Mardi Gras” Then met with Ken Davis and Max Pearce. Ken agreed.	Ken Davis Max Pearce
<b>Time</b>	<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Proper Names</b>
	<b>Tape 2 Side B</b>	
000	Describes the start of the first Mardi Gras. Some people dressed in costume, but at first only a few people. Police came by to wish them well. One float with a sound system. Sally Colechin took photos. Later a few more people. When it started marchers were hunted down the street.	Sally Colechin
021	Provides a possible trigger for idea for mardi gras. Film called Word is Out with shorts of colourful street demonstrations.	Peter Adair Word is Out
041	Assessment of the mardi gras. People said that it was cheap and you didn't achieve things that way. But he believes it is a powerful political statement but it was not intended that way. It has created its own momentum. For most people it was liberating. Remembers fondly the 25 <sup>th</sup> anniversary mardi gras.	Christopher Pearson
098	To grow up in 2004? Not for him. No regrets.	