

Pride History Group Oral History Interview with John Baker

Interviewer: John Witte

Date: 13 April 2013

Location of interview: At John's residence, Katoumba

Reason for interview:

Restrictions: None



Time	Summary	Keywords
0.26	Born Murwillumbah, northern NSW; father policeman and returned from WWII; mother a nurse (daughter of a dairy farmer)	Family life
1.20	Family were country people with very conservative views; stable family life	
1.47	Moved every few years with father's job, e.g. to Harwood Island on the Clarence River	
2.21	Small gaol cell out the back of the house for drunks; Mother would feed them breakfast.	
2.33	So brought up in police stations and gaols. E.g. Narrabri Gaol (now a museum) – a low security prison, mixed with prisoners who chopped their wood, did gardening; inmates would bribe them to get cigarette butts for them and would make mud planes for the kids.	Narrabri
3.20	Narrabri was very isolated, left there at age 10 or 11, went to normal public schools	
3.38	Didn't enjoy school very much; didn't get on well with a teacher – possibly because of his gay expressions; felt misunderstood and demotivated. The teacher may have recognized his flamboyant nature.	School
4.35	Strong male stereotypical culture at that time; was in the school choir, but father thought that was unbecoming, discouraged that. Stopped him singing	
5.02	Had a pet monkey doll – tied a bow on his tail and carried it around; this was frowned upon. It was a very conservative, red neck town.	
5.35	Moved to Uralla near Armidale. Only there a year. Still didn't like school.	
5.52	Moved to Bundarra: Flourished there. Loved school. Top of the class. Was about 12, went through puberty there. Would go to the river with all the boys to play with each other.	Bundarra
7.12	Left alone a lot. Boys would masturbate, compete to see who would come first. Trying to fill up a bottle.	
8.33	Father started own business, failed, quite poor	
8.48	At age 15, left school; moved to Port Kembla to an apprenticeship - electrical	Port Kembla
9.28	Realized he was gay before then – had more interest in boys, no interest in girls at all. Mother would bring home magazines and then he would masturbate to photos of men in underwear.	

	Did think he was the only one. Didn't know anyone else who was gay. Never doubted he was gay but thought there was something wrong with him.	
10.30	Believed family would not accept it, but years later found out they did accept it.	
10.58	Did go to church every Sunday; it was like a social club.	
11.16	Moving to Port Kembla at 15 was very lonely. So went to the Presbyterian Church in Port Kembla. Young minister there became his adopted father. Introduced him to more middle-class type pursuits. Helped awaken new interests in him.	Presbyterian Church
13.00	Formed Church Fellowship – became a meeting place for prospective partners; would play spin the bottle, but wasn't interested in kissing the girls.	Church Fellowship
13.30	Still no exposure at all to gay scene; Oak Flats toilets – notes; there he met Larry, who later became Loretta at Les Girls. Larry befriended him. Taught him all the gay terminology. Went driving for hours. Showed him where the beats were in Wollongong.	Larry/Loretta Wollongong beats
14.36	Had a scooter – out all night, and then go into work	
14.46	Would turn up to Church Fellowship with love bites on neck	
14.58	Spotted at the drive-in holding hand with another man – felt exposed. Drifted out of the fellowship.	
15.24	Still felt alienated, still coming to terms with being gay, concerned about growing old and being alone. Wondering whether it was right.	
15.45	A lot of policing of behaviour during apprenticeship, accused each other of being gay all the time. Worst thing there was being a poofter.	
16.25	Was top apprentice, won a prize, but still felt alienated. Managed to get out the apprenticeship on medical grounds.	
17.30	Came to Sydney and boarded with the Presbyterian Minister who had befriended him in PK, but wasn't out to him. Left him a tape saying he was gay. Accepted that. First time that someone who wasn't gay accepted him for who he was.	Sydney
18.40	Loretta – now lived as a woman in Vacluse. He moved in with her and her boyfriend – across the road from Trixie.	Loretta, Vacluse
19.47	Had spent a lot of time doing the beats, Boomerang Street, Balmoral, Bondi Rocks (coming up from Wollongong)	
21.05	Started going to bars: Enzos was the first bar went to (had never drank) – very intimidating in the camp scene; bitchy; didn't have the patter or the social skills, or the knowledge. A lot of jealousy, rivalry.	Enzos
22.48	Sex was one-night stands. Attitude: Found all gay people unattractive. That they were not 'normal' and that gay people didn't have long term relations. The beats was just anonymous sex.	Sex
24.40	Did want more, affection, relationship	

24.50	Chez Ivys (1969) – Saturday afternoons – she was like a mother to him. Have a cup of tea upstairs, and a chat. A lovely friendship. Open door to pop in and say hello. 19 at the time.	Chez Ivy
26.55	Worked in Waterloo in the advertising dept.	
28.05	Worked at Modern Magazine as a copyboy – gained great experience. Got to know industry people. And knew how to publish a magazine by the end of this.	Modern Magazines
29.30	Encouraged to learn, e.g. took photos at rugby matches	
29.55	Next job as Ad assistant. One woman there picked him as gay. Invited him to a party in Ramsgate. Wore tight white jeans, a brown cowboy leather vest with tassels and they all wanted him. Very popular! Met William there. And life changed completely.	William
31.40	William was a science teacher; moved in together in North Manly. Had champagne breakfasts and lots of gay parties.	
32.00	William’s family from Balgowlah, he went to Sydney Uni. A teacher a Shore. Was a friend of Peter Trebilco.	Peter Trebilco
32.55	William was cultured, loved classical music, literature. A different world for John. Felt inferior about not matriculating. But felt he could learn a lot from William.	
33.55	At their parties, there would be a fair bit of sex/promiscuity. All pre-AIDS.	
33.40	At one party, hippies came in and sat in a circle, smoking marijuana. One of them was Michael Delaney – editor of CAMP INC. ‘William and John’ was well-known by then. John got off with Michael and left William soon after that.	Michael Delaney CAMP INC
36.40	Switched to ‘Michael and John’. Some trouble with William.	
37.35	Michael made a bee line for John, and John was completely taken by Michael.	
38.40	Financially stable by this time, with income from the magazine/publishing.	
38.50	‘William and John’ was John’s idea. Always wanted a gay magazine – to fill vacuum of lack of knowledge. Liked the mechanics of publishing. Something like a newsletter.	William and John
40.55	One contact, Bill Horne, a typesetter who had his own hetero publishing co. Shared knowledge on publishing and which publisher would publish male nudes.	Bill Horne
42.27	First printer was Geoff Chandler	
43.05	Started out small scale, no money; put an ad in the Nation Review for pre-publication subscriptions; received thousands – shocked! This funded the magazine.	
44.50	Sideline selling photos of nude men	
45.40	In some editions parts of magazine cut out – done by the printer in VIC. Painted on bikinis. Glossy section censored.	
47.50	Didn’t put any effort into getting advertising. But did advertise the magazine. Didn’t think of ads as source of income. But did rip off	

	other ads (e.g. for vodka) to make the magazine look more orthodox.	
49.10	Overwhelming how quickly it all happened – offices in Sussex St and another in Surry Hills. Gave up the day job. Had a number of staff. Not much of a businessman. Bill Horne was the distributor and paid the lease. But didn't get much income at all.	
50.45	For the images: Placed an ad in Sydney Morning Herald for male models – and lots applied. Sometime got friends to pose.	
51.45	Edition 3: Michael Delaney knew how to write and the editorial side of things. Helped them to integrate with Gay Liberation. Dennis Altman started to write for the magazine. Paid Aus journalist rates.	Gay Liberation Dennis Altman
53.55	Was willing to hand over the magazine to CAMP INC. Many were writing for the magazine in later editions: Lex Watson, Don Baxter. Didn't like the nudes.	Lex Watson Don Baxter
55.00	Still felt inferior, but later went to Uni and did an honours degree.	
56.00	William and John was groundbreaking, but prosecuted about 40 times under obscene and indecent publications act. Police visited; raided. Both VIC and NSW laid charges.	
57.00	Had talked to Attorney General about legality of the magazine. Advised that on the cusp, publish and find out, but things are changing.	
57.30	Went to Melbourne for one of the court cases. Fined \$10.	
58.20	William died of AIDS; lost contact with him when left Sydney and folded the magazine. Felt betrayed by him over the court case.	
59.50	When William and John first came out, they went on Mike Willesee's A Current Affair (1972?) with Bill Horne. John got stage fright. Soon after this, William lost (or left) his job at Shore. It was a public outing. William went back to Uni.	A Current Affair
62.40	Ultimately, the magazine failed; a combo of hippies and drugs at their house in Fairlight.	Drugs
64.25	Referred to the magazine as a CAMP magazine (not gay)	
64.55	Became very dysfunctional, breaking up with Michael (who seemed more interested in the magazine). Felt used for the status of 'William and John'.	
66.10	Became clinically depressed; suicide attempt. Drugs and alcohol were his undoing; going to Nimbin occasionally as well. Exposed to counter culture; Started fantasizing about becoming a bee farmer. So the magazine died out.	Nimbin
68.25	Left the magazine to two friends and must fulfil responsibilities to subscribers. But doesn't know what happened after that.	
69.30	Was associated with the mafia; Harry Strum was a business friend; shared publishing knowledge.	Harry Strum
71.35	Sold a lot stuff through the sex shops.	
73.30	People were impressed with the magazine, but by that time he was winding up.	

74.35	Very young, 20 or 21, and in the drop-out culture, so didn't want to mix with the orthodox gay scene.	
75.50	They came out of nowhere with the magazine. People used to think these 'rich old north shore queens' were behind the magazine, not these 21-year-old dope smokers.	
76.35	Their age, lack of maturity, another reason why the magazine folded.	
76.50	Jim Anderson came to stay at the house for the weekend, and went to bed with Michael. Michael used Jim for his notoriety.	
78.25	Did the hippy dope trials, went to England. Hitchhiked to Darwin, flew to what was then Portuguese Timor, caught a cargo ship to Bali, and overland via India, Pakistan etc to England. Took a year to get there.	England
80.00	Lived in a commune with squatters in Bournemouth. Smoking dope. Reading. Dropped out.	
81.00	Realised this was not a good life. Wanted to 'drop back in' – came back to Australia. Broke all contacts with the drug scene.	
81.35	Job as electrician, which he hated.	
81.55	Family got him a block of land next door, trying to settle him down. Still hadn't told his family he was gay. Even brother had trouble accepting he was gay.	Family
82.50	Did eventually tell parents he was gay. Sort of accepted it.	
83.50	Bored, depressed. Took off again. Went to Darwin.	
84.15	Had an interesting experience in Cairns with a blond hippy.	
84.50	Presbyterian chaplain was in Adelaide, so went there to stay with him (couch surfing). Chaplain of the uni. Ended up going to Uni (1977) and came out of the depression, stopped smoking dope, and was happy. Integrated into the Adelaide gay scene over next 2 years. Friendly, accepting.	Adelaide
86.20	House parties in Adelaide often had up to 600 people.	
87.00	Gay scene was at the Buckingham Arms Hotel in the back bar after 11pm.	Buckingham Arms Hotel
87.40	Still a public servant, loves the social aspect. Always worked in welfare/social service.	
89.00	Now living the Blue Mountains. 16-year relationship has just ended. Now feels like left off the leash. Further options opening up. Discovered the gay apps!	
91.20	Final thoughts: William and John was a courageous act. Totally open, sold around the country, going on TV to discuss it – a revolutionary, radical step.	