

Oral History Interview with Charlie Bowers

Interviewer: John Witte

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Location of interview: Macleay Street, Kings Cross

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Restrictions:



Log	Summary	Key words
0000	Born in January 1938 in Sydney. He had one sister. His father was a Detective in the Vice Squad and the family lived in Ryde. He went to the local Catholic School, St Charles.	St Charles
0142	His father had a heart attack and was pensioned out of the police. They moved to a flat in Lavender Bay. He went to St Aloysius School. He enjoyed it there. The family were not well off, but his mother's family were old boys at St Aloysius and he got in at half rates.	St Aloysius
0237	Through a contact in cadets he got into Naval College. He recollects the private school bias in the intake.	
0332	School was run by the Jesuits and the teachers were all graduates. Small class sizes and there a sense of culture. Charlie did well in science. One year he won the prize as the most enthusiastic chorus girl in the Gilbert and Sullivan opera.	Jesuits
0556	His first interest in other males was at school, but he suppressed this.	
0618	Went into Naval College at 15. He was never a good sportsman, except swimming. Because such a large percentage had come from GPS boarding schools, there was an acceptance of sexual attraction among the boys. He recalls dancing around and lying on the bunks and cuddling when he was 15 or 16. It was not sexual and there was no atmosphere of punishment.	Navy Boarding Schools
0853	After 2 years at the Naval College, he went to Dartmouth Royal Naval College in the UK for 2 years. There was more freedom and it was run like a university. He went to London a lot for ballet, music etc. Again a lot of the students were from the British Upper Class and there was a lot of acceptance.	Dartmouth Royal Naval College
0953	He had some close friendships during the period. There were a couple of boys who slept together and this was frowned upon, because you were not supposed to go into another person's "cabin".	
1120	At this period he became interested in the church. When he came back to Melbourne University to study electronics and after 18 months he left the navy. At Trinity College a lot of the students came from the same private schools. He developed a friendship with a roommate, but too nervous about the sexual side, because he was thinking about going into the Church.	Melbourne University Trinity College
1308	In about 1967 he entered the seminary and stayed on at St Columbus and St Patricks Manly until 1965 (?). He had a falling out with Cardinal Gilroy over his involvement in the anti-Vietnam War Moratorium and left. He had spoken at meetings and go in marches and he forbad him to do this.	St Columbus Seminary St Patricks Seminary Cardinal Gilroy Moratorium
1445	Then he went to England to work for a Bishop who was progressive - Derrick Warlock. He had more freedom to continue ? his political work.	Derrick Warlock
1530	He went to the States for a holiday and became involved with the moratorium there. He met up with a group centred around the Catholic Worker in New York. They had "resistance communes" and he moved to one of these in St Louis. All the men were draft resisters and mostly teachers. So they ran a grade school for black kids and Charlie taught in the school for 6 months. When his visa ran out he overstayed and then went back to Sydney.	Moritorium "Catholic Worker" St Loius Resistance Communes

1835	The commune was in an old Victorian building. They were mostly middle class kids. A couple were on the run from the police after burning down the university regiment building. So the commune was often raided. A large group were Quakers and opposed to the war. Charlie got to know the Catholic priest, Daniel Berrigan there. They went to one of the big marches on Washington in 1969. A million people there.	Quakers Daniel Berrigan Washington
2055	Charlie got straight back into the Moratorium here and spoke on the steps of the Sydney Town Hall in 1971 or 72. Gay relationships were peripheral to this.	Moratorium
2207	In the late 1970 he got involved the setting up of CAMP. He got a job at John Briggs bookshop. He was a South African anti-apartheid guy. The Bookshop was in Anchor House.	John Briggs Anchor House
2245	He remembers meeting Dennis Altman there. Also Michael Cass who was lecturing at UNSW in Sociology Department. He remembers going to Michael and John Ware's flat in McMahons Point overlooking the big dipper. And Christabel Poll had a flat nearby. He recollects the night when they discussed the name of the organisation they were setting up. He said he came up with name of CAMP.	Dennis Altman Michael Cass Christabel Poll CAMP
2429	"Well camp, you know, everybody was camp and then we looked for initials – Campaign Against Moral Persecution. It sort of fitted together."	
2450	John and Michael were looking for somewhere bigger to move to. They lived upstairs in the clubrooms in Balmain. There were fund raising barbeques in the backyard next door to the fire station. "The firemen used to sit on the fence and look, and they weren't at all critical ... of this gay organisation. They were more interested in the beer ... so they would start dropping over the fence and coming in and that became a regular feature of the barbeques, the firemen."	John Ware Michael Cass Balmain
2625	Remembers having discussions with Dennis Altman there at the time that he was forming (gay liberation). Something Charlie didn't relate to.	Dennis Altmann
2709	The meetings at McMahons Point. He remembers John, Michael, Christabel. They were to set up a group. At that time John and Michael did the interview with <i>The Australian</i> . In response to the publicity hundreds of letters arrived in support of them. He thinks he might have attended meetings after the publicity.	McMahon's Point "The Australian"
3015	Also remembers going to meetings in John and Michael's flat above 393 before CAMP moves in around Christmas time (1970)	393 Darling Street
3120	<i>Why did people come to CAMP?</i> "I think it was more political, because there was a certain feeling like I'd never really been, gone to the clubs much at that stage ... the Bondi Junction one I can remember going to quite vividly, 2 or 3 times. There was no link as such, in fact there was a bit of a, some tension already. The people who ran those ... there was a feeling of whoever ran these places that they were nervous about getting involved in CAMP, because they were already paying off the cops and they, it suited them to stay underground, in fact they regarded it as rather dangerous, so there wasn't any close, that's the feeling I got."	CAMP
3400	He remembers the front bar at the Rex. It was packed at weekends. Charlie went there in 1970 and regularly when he moved to Macleay Street in 1982, when it moved to the Bottom Up at the back.	Rex Front Bar Rex Bottoms Up
3510	Michael Cass was pretty serious in those days. He had a plan, that he envisaged CAMP as a political pressure group for law reform.	Michael Cass
3530	Charlie mentions his experiences with law reform in 1980 when he started working for the Deputy Premier Jack Ferguson after he finished his undergraduate degree.	Jack Ferguson
3621	In the mid 70s he was in Italy teaching and when he came back he went to Sydney University to finish his degree. He met Craig Johnston, Dennis Altman who were teaching in the Government Department, and Lex Watson. It was Lex and Craig and Charlie who got an appointment to see Jack Ferguson to do something about	Craig Johnston Dennis Altman Lex Watson Jack Ferguson

	Homosexual Law Reform. "Wran was terribly nervous about it, of having any involvement at that stage because he was terrified of the Catholics, Freeman who was a terrible homophobe. And Wran was encouraged in this attitude by Gerry Gleeson who was the head of Premier's Department and a member of the knights of the Southern Cross." (ie the Catholic masons)	Homosexual Law Reform Cardinal Freeman Gerry Gleeson Knights of the Southern Cross
3740	"It wasn't until, and I always believe that it took, it wasn't until Freeman moved out of the job of either died or retired, from being Archbishop, and Clancy who was gay, a closet queen, took over and I was actually still working or maybe in one of his (Jack's) departments, and still involved in what was happening and again there was pressure and that pressure from John Marsden at the Council of Civil Liberties, put pressure on Wran and embarrassed Wran, that Wran decided, agreed to have another go at it. But just co-incidentally, Clancy had taken over, I know this for fact, Wran, through Gleeson said what will your attitude be to homosexual law reform and Clancy's reply was that he believed it had nothing to do with the Church, the legislation. And that's when it went through. So he I think, deserves the recognition that he's never had".	Cardinal Clancy John Marsden Council for Civil Liberties Gerry Gleeson
4030	After Jack Ferguson retired, Charlie worked in Office for Special Employment, and worked on Aboriginal employment. He was lobbying with Craig and Lex. He wrote a speech for Delcia Kite and she gave it to the upper house on ?anti-discrimination. Lex was key to the anti-discrimination changes.	Jack Ferguson Office for Special Employment Delcia Kite Lex Watson
4200	<i>The role of the Labor Council?</i> Unsworth put up his own bill between the Peterson and the Wran bills. And Michael Egan put up a bill. (Note: Bill Lesley has Charlie's archive) Charlie doesn't believe that the Labor Council had much of a role. Jack Ferguson was very important. He supported the Peterson Bill which was for equality. Charlie was in Ferguson's office from the end of 1980 for 2 years until he retired. His main job was handling the huge amount of mail he got supporting and attacking homosexual law reform.	Unsworth Bill Peterson Bill Wran Bill Egan Bill
4520	He had meetings with the Bureau of Crime Statistics (?), a division of Premier's department and obtained a large amount of information about police entrapment. Sergeant Green would go to the toilets in Town Hall Station every day. That's all he did. He worked under Delaney. A large number of the arrests were school teachers.	Bureau of Crime Statistics Sergeant Green Town Hall Station Commissioner Delaney
4750	They, the Criminal Law Review Division were drafting the bills – for Peterson, Unsworth, Egan and Wran. Frank Walker was Attorney General and he was instrumental in a quiet way.	Criminal Law Review Division Frank Walker
4850	Law Reform was a left initiative, but it interesting connections with the Liberals. Charlie used to go and talk to John Dowd and maybe Metherill. This gave them hope. They were pushing for a conscience vote, because they thought they could collect a few more. <i>Pressure to change the law for the Liberals?</i> Probably gay friends.	Law Reform Liberal Party John Dowd
5240	People like Johnno Johnson were so nervous about the Catholic Church so he was antagonistic. By the time of the Peterson Bill about a third were voting for law reform. And by the time of the Unsworth Bill it almost got up. During discussions about the Wran Bill, they demanded it not be retrospective, because they had their "dirt files". Then there was the age of consent battle. Gay lib and Craig broke off at that stage and were strongly against the Wran Bill until the last minute because it was discriminatory. Charlie supported it because "that was all we were going to get, as it turned out to be the case".	Johnno Johnson Peterson Bill Unsworth Bill Gay Lib Craig Johnston Wran Bill
5600	<i>Was there any reaction to the growth of protest especially size of mardi gras by the politicians?</i> In the early 80s police were still raiding places like Club 80 and people	Club 80 Neville Wran

	getting locked up going to see Wran. That kept the whole thing on the boil. “of course they lost out on the mardi gras, they wanted to have other venues of extortion or ability to beat people up and they were getting money out of those clubs. They wanted to keep it underground. It was a great weapon for them right through that period. If they wanted to get something on someone it was always there in the background”.	
5825	“it just disappeared particularly after the equality bill went through. It took away a whole section of the police industry”.	
5900	<i>Police corruption.</i> “Eventually Wran did see the link between what was happening with the gay venues and, but really I think the civil liberties thing was so key to his decision because he wanted to present himself as a civil libertarian and here he was reaching the end of his parliamentary career and this great wound in his reputation ... and the church thing I think was important, once the Cardinal was on side, ‘cause they saw the Catholic vote as very important, which it was, but also there was so many Catholics in Parliament. The Church could exert a lot of pressure on the right of the Labor Party. The other churches, the Uniting Church was very important in the background in support of law reform and we were constantly having delegations from the Uniting Church coming to see, I remember them coming to see Jack Ferguson about it. So that was a balance, but not that they were anywhere near important as the Catholic Church.”	Neville Wran Cardinal Clancy Uniting Church Jack Ferguson Catholic Church
10053	<i>Fred Nile.</i> “I don’t think he saw the law reform. It crept up on him. Again, like the police he was a bit stupid ... instead of getting his forces lined up in the right areas to block, as the Catholic Church used to”	Fred Nile
10230	Those early years at CAMP, my memories are of lots of parties, the BBQs and the membership soared. It got over a thousand in a year. He remembers someone noting that there was a huge percentage of high school teachers or academics among them – 80% at one stage.	CAMP
10400	<i>A lot of the people in the commercial scene had no tertiary education.</i> Charlies says that was another reason there was not any link between the bars and CAMP, because they two separate sociological groups.	
10435	Issues with coming out. CAMP decided not to put names to the faces on the front cover of Camp Ink, because of the fear of blackmail. People were not prepared to do this for their jobs especially in education.	“Camp Ink”
10630	Charlie talks about Michael Cass’s boss at UNSW Sociology Department who was very supportive of law reform. And Lex Watson at USyd Department of Government. It all came together in the late 70s.	UNSW Dept of Sociology USyd Dept of Govt
10735	<i>Anti Psychiatry stance of CAMP.</i> They tried to get as much publicity as they could about what McConaughy and they had people who had been treated by McConaughy.	Neil McConaughy
10907	<i>Why did the phone service start?</i> He thinks it was in response to a particular incident of people needing support.	
11210	<i>Were the early members religious?</i> Bonsall came to meetings of CAMP and Charlie went to demo outside St Clements. The support group within CAMP was for the Anglicans. Nothing for the Catholics at that stage. He was involved in a group called Catholics for Peace about the Vietnam War up until 1972.	Peter Bonsall-Boone CAMP Catholics for Peace Vietnam War
11440	“There was a good attitude right from the very start (toward women), due to people like Christabel Poll it was made quite clear that it was not a mono-sexual organisation. I think in fact CAMP had the advantage over Gay Lib in that regard. Gay Lib was more hard line boys.”	Christabel Poll CAMP Gay Liberation
11540	He met Dennis Altman prior to 1970.(?) They were both involved in the Moratorium prior to Charlie going overseas (1967) but he didn’t say anything about Gay Liberation. He was pretty closetty back then. In 1970 they met at John Briggs	Dennis Altman Moratorium John Briggs Bookshop

	<p>Bookshop. He'd heard from someone that Charlie had been involved in both the draft resisters and gay liberation in St Louis. He wanted contacts in St Louis. When he came back he was the "guru". Dennis was at many meetings at CAMP discussing, and holding court. In retrospect, he think Dennis was making his moves then. He had a view that CAMP was pretty bourgeois and wish washy. There was resentment when he left and siphoned off the activists from CAMP and having a separate agenda. CAMP was defining itself at that stage as a social club, although Michael Cass might have had a firmer agenda.</p>	<p>St Louis Michael Cass</p>
12000	<p>It was about this time in late 1972, that Charlie went overseas. When he came back in 1978 he studied at Sydney Univ where Craig, Lex and Dennis were teaching.</p>	<p>Sydney University</p>
12115	<p>He became quite close to Craig and moved in to his house in East Sydney. He had cut all his ties to CAMP.</p>	<p>East Sydney</p>
12200	<p>He went back to uni because he became interested in politics and he wanted to study political science. Before he left he was working for TAFE as a recreation officer and still interested in politics as a means of changing things and in the back of his mind, homosexual law reform. He got the Government Prize at uni and because of that he got the job in the Deputy Premier's Office. It was a life changing move. He got involved in law reform issues.</p>	<p>Homosexual Law Reform Deputy Premier</p>
12330	<p>During the 80s he worked in a couple of departments around employment to deal with aboriginal employment and in 1990 he shifted over to the Commonwealth Electoral Office, working in the Sydney office as a PR person at election time. After that he started working for the United Nations. In 1992 he worked in Cambodia to run their elections for a year. Came back to recover for 6 months from a bombing. At the end of the 90s was contacted by the UN to work in East Timor for the referendum in 1999. Then took early retirement and went up to East Timor in 2001 for another election. His job was organising it. In 1999 it was horrific with the Indonesians.</p>	<p>Commonwealth Electoral Office United Nations Cambodia East Timor</p>
12830	<p>Charlie doesn't believe in gay marriage or marriage at all. For him it is a red herring and confuses the issue.</p>	<p>Gay marriage</p>