

Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Karen Brown

Interviewer: Ken Davis

Date: 21st January 2007

Location of interview:

Reason for interview: Early Social Groups

Restrictions: None



Time	Summary	Keywords
0000	Karen was born in 1948 and grew up in Alexandria (a Sydney Suburb). She went to Alexs Public School and lived most of her life with her mother. She had a step father who left them when she was 14.	Alexandria; Alexandria Public School;
0045	She was always interested in sport and became heavily involved at JJ Cahill High School in women's (field) hockey.	JJ Cahill High School;
0145	Realised her sexuality through involvement with hockey.	
0231	Life revolved around her mother and her sport. Got involved with cricket during summer. Eventually became President of the YWCA Cricket Team.	YWCA Cricket Team;
0252	Played, coached, umpired hockey and held offices. K has retired since 1989 when she began caring for her mum, working for the tax office and the aboriginal community and got burnt out. Decided to concentrate on working with aboriginal community and Pollys.	Pollys;
0448	Pollys Social Club was formed in 1967. It was a break off from the Chameleons. K came in in the early 70s when a hockey player introduced her to the Pollys, "because there was nothing around for the firlsw to go to – all boys venues".	Pollys Social Club; Chameleons;
0535	K says that there were 2 breakaways from the Chameleons – the Pollys and the Boomerangs.	Boomerangs;
0605	Pollys "had the whole range of GLBT's, the camaraderie. One boy looked after her. His name was Paul and he lived with his boyfriend in Newtown.	Paul; Newtown;
0712	To set up a dance, the first thing to do was to go to the garage in Mascot where they stored all their equipment – costumes, lighting – and bring it around to the Coronation Hall. They would start at 7am and finish after the dance at 3am.	Mascot; Coronation Hall;
0800	Coronation Hall was not the greatest venue – not much technology or décor, but as they did it up it became a nice venue.	
0838	Everybody has a set task – working in the kitchen, the stage etc. Paul and his group would do the lighting, others did the tables. Their outfits were black and white and the table cloths were an awful orange. K was in a few shows and she also oversaw the event and sometimes also worked the second spot light. She might also work in the kitchen or manage the show and fill in for people who didn't turn up. As President she was also delegating.	

1050	K mentions Bill the Secretary and Murray the VP and Anthea the treasurer who also looked after the box office.	Bill; Murray; Anthea;
1155	Rehearsals were “where we could get a hall”. From 1967 until the early 80s Pollys donated more than \$100,000 to charities such as the R.S.P.C.A., the Cancer Foundation, MS, Crippled Children and later to the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation.	RSPCA; Cancer Foundation; MS; Crippled Children; Bobby Goldsmith Foundation;
1250	In 1971 she was invited by a hockey friend to a Pollys dance. K asked if she could get involved. About 25% of the membership were women.	
1414	After a disagreement she decided to quit but then got a phone call from 4 members to ask her back. She was elected Vice President and later was elected President..	
1459	K discovers that the constitution was a one page hand written document that had never been passed at any meeting, and advised the members to have the constitution passed by a meeting, because they could be open to litigation as individuals.	
1650	The constitution was drawn up by a lawyer friend and passed at a meeting and registered as the constitution.	
1730	The money they raised would be saved until December and then divided between charities and Pollys where it would be used to cover running costs.	Pollys;
1817	K has worked as an office manager, purchasing officer, dispatch clerk, warehouse supervisor, sales clerk, and driven a taxi.	
1858	There weren't many venues for girls so tended to go to the boys venues. The Park Inn a.k.a. the Pork Inn that was in Oxford Street opposite Centennial Park (now the Centennial Hotel) run by Ken Johnson. It has a small stage where Ken put on drag show which was no bigger than the size of a car and there was dancing.	The Park Inn; Pork Inn; Oxford Street; Centennial Park; Centennial Park Hotel; Ken Johnson;
1946	K was 21 in 1969 and the majority who went there were women.	
2030	“Dawnie had the Birdcage for a while” which burnt down.	Dawn O'Donnell;
2042	Women also went to Capriccios.	Capriccios
2050	K and the hockey players would go out on a Saturday night to the Student Prince in Camperdown or the Bayswater Inn in Bayswater Road, depending on the season. The Publicans were fantastic. The girls would organise raffles for the hockey club.	Student Prince Camperdown; Bayswater Inn Bayswater Road;
2135	In the hockey club there was a wide mix of professions.	
2240	K explains that the Pollys dances were every 2 months and these were intermixed with these other two venues.	Pollys dances;
2300	Polly-limpics was run by Pollys. Binnie Beef would be hired to feed the masses – hundreds of people. It was held at Erskineville Oval, Mascot Oval, North Ryde, Fairfield – where ever they could get a field. It has started not long before K had joined Pollys.	Polly-limpics; Binne Beef; Erskineville Oval; Mascot Oval; North Ryde; Fairfield;

2430	Can remember it as a time when everyone could get together and it was a chance to show your competitiveness. She can remember hand bag tossing. But there were very good athletes and the more competitive events were the 100 metres, the 440 and the 880. They had to lay the fields for these events. Once they included long jump when the fields had a sandpit.	
2600	About 400 – 500 attended. There weren't too many clubs. It was more individuals and their little groups. Cronulla Gay Group, Boomerangs, Clover attended.	Cronulla Gay Group;
2649	Remembers going to the Clover Club in Drummoyne occasionally.	Clover Club; Drummoyne;
2740	Mentions her OAM for services to hockey and the aboriginal community.	Order of Australia; Aboriginal;
2820	Raising money for charity benefited the recipients and the gay community as well, because it gave them a venue, time to socialize their own groups of people.	
2920	Dances were advertised by word of mouth and the Group has a mailing list.	
3000	Mentions an organization who wanted to use the Pollys mailing list. A thinly disguised paedophile group and Pollys referred it on to the police.	Paedophile Group
3052	The Pollys were about giving people a venue, a good time and socializing.	
3124	Garry Trotter just started when K finished at Pollys and K pays tribute to Garry for keeping the organization going.	Garry Trotter; Pollys;
3200	Amber, Michelle, Paul were Karen's predecessors at Pollys.	Amber; Michelle; Paul;
3244	Planning shows. They has a group of 3 that put it all together – they did the music, choreography, (particularly Amber). It was a small group effort rather than individuals. Each person made their own costume. When Karen couldn't made one, one of the boys outfitted her and they didn't ask for any money and costumes were donated to the group by members. "That was the type of people I was with" and who held Pollys together.	Amber; Pollys;
3435	They didn't participate in other events with other groups because they were too busy with their own shows and their jobs. Some times they would go out as a small group and have dinner.	
3625	K says there was never any problem with violence. They had regulars who would book a table for 10 or 20. "They were ladies and they were gentlemen and ... they behaved as such". "You would always get to know the people coming in"	
3822	Karen and Bill (Secretary) attended early Mardi Gras meetings. Pollys held one of the concessions at the first dances – paid for it. They sold hamburgers. The second year they ran the Cloak room at the Showground.	Bill; Mardi Gras; Cloak Room;

4203	Pollys entries for the parades were like a show but on a float. Same preparation but its purpose was to raise awareness for what they did rather than money for charity. They consistently put in a float over the years.	Mardi Gras Parade;
4345	Men and women in the group were like brothers and sisters. K relates how she would walk into the change room of half naked performers and this didn't anyone.	
4440	K talks about coming out to her mother and after she calmed down said "as long as you're happy, I'm happy".	
4600	Her mother was born in Kempsey and at age 3 was taken from her mother. She was part of the stolen generations. She was sent out to work when she was 13. Her birth was never registered.	Kempsey; Stolen Generation;
4750	Karen's family supports her and loves her girlfriend. The Aboriginal community is also supportive and non-judgemental. At work she came out in 1988 at the Taxation Office because she was holding a number of posts – on the EEO Committee, Harassment Contact Officer, Aboriginal Liaison Officer (Customers and staff).	Aboriginal Community; Taxation Office; EEO Committee; Harassment Contact Officer; Aboriginal Liaison Officer;
5100	Karen's social life was non existent until she got involved with sport and Pollys. She did not relationships with women in the hockey team or in Pollys because it was too close to home. She has met her partners at work and at social gatherings.	