

**Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Judy Burnett**

Interviewer: Robert Colman (corrected by Judy 26/8/06)

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Date of interview: 12 June 2006

Location of interview: Silver Street, Marrickville

Restrictions: None



Time	Summary	Keywords
	<b>File No. 1</b>	
0054	Judy came from Brisbane to Sydney in 1961	Brisbane
0108	First venue she went to was the Jewel Box. Very dark with a stage in the middle. A long room with tables and chairs set around. It has a square stage but no curtain. People dressed and stepped out from behind curtains on the sides. Did the number and disappeared to the sides. Stage was about 15 foot square more of dais. Held about 80 patrons. Milk Bar downstairs and a flight of stairs that took you up.	Jewel Box
0345	What J remembers of the gay scene in Brisbane and Sydney was that the venues were out the back. "You were not in view of people passing"	Brisbane
0407	From what she remembers there was nothing in Brisbane. Bars were always in hotels. She was underage (17) but no one ever questioned her. Age limit was 21. They were bars with no entertainment.	Brisbane Age limit
0457	Only entertainment was at private parties.	
0501	Person J went to school with organised and run the Queen Birthday Balls for 45 years (since 1962/3).	Queen Birthday Balls
0533	Didn't perform at the Jewel Box. Wore drag at weekends. Dressed to go to venues and took it off to go to work.	Jewel Box
0600	Worked for a manufacturer of older ladies clothing – "Triple Star" – as a cutter. Describes what the job entailed.	Triple Star
0655	Learned dress making when 12 when mother encouraged her to make a shirt. Her grandmother was a tailoress and she watched her. Then taught herself and then took up formal training.	
	<b>File No. 2</b>	
0001	What was it like being in drag in the early 60s? J described herself as an introvert when she came to Sydney. Stood in the background terrified of being attacked. Tried to look as real as possible. Never over the top.	
0133	Other people at the Jewel Box – Kandy, Jacquie Monier. Met Carlotta and Jackie Frawley. She went about twice.	Jewel Box, Kandy, Jacquie Monier, Carlotta, Jackie Frawley
0221	After that had an affair with a dentist at Whale Beach or Avalon. That is where she met Jimmy Fishburn who was putting on show called 8 Belles to be performed at Whale Beach for one or two	Whale Beach Avalon Jimmy Fishburn 8 Belles

	nights in a hall. Set up like a nightclub tables, a stage. Jimmy said "show me your legs", but she didn't become part of that.	
0353	Judy talks about her involvement with entertainment as a teenager in Brisbane. She has been sent along to watch over her younger siblings at a dancing school but got involved and performed at the gaol in Brisbane, an asylum and old people's homes – tap dancing. She wore drag in one number Blue dress, white fishtail and hat	Brisbane
0530	Worked at Chez Ivy. A friend in Brisbane suggested she meet Claudia. Claudia made clothes and she worked with Claudia making frocks and Claudia introduced her to Ivy (Richter)	Chez Ivy Brisbane Claudia Ivy Richter
0602	Ivy said she was opening a wine bar and asked if J wanted to be a bunny girl.	
0617	They were bar maids dressed in black leotards, bunny ears and a pom pom on the bum.	
0637	Chez Ivy was the first Oxford Street venue and was in Bondi Junction. It consisted of two shops with 2 door ways. One was blocked off and you walked straight off the street into the bar. Blacked out and UV lighting everywhere. Flouro abstract things on the ceiling. Grapes.	Chez Ivy Bondi Junction
0750	At that stage J didn't know anything about the drag scene.	
0808	J tells a story about police coming into the bar and a friend she was talking with slipped something warm into her hot pants. It was a gun. The friend was searched by the police.	
0929	About 24 yrs – 27 years of age she worked at the Purple Onion. It was open Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. The gang from Chez Ivy would go on Sundays when Chez Ivy was closed and watch the floor show.	Purple Onion Chez Ivy
1050	J explains how Chez Ivy would close its doors but would have customers upstairs. They lived on the premises – Polly Pam and Judy. It was 2 old shops with a room at the back and a flight of stairs to the first floor. Single rooms and kitchens.	Chez Ivy Polly Pam
1254	Just worked 6 days at week (at Ivys)	
	<b>File 3</b>	
0008	Before Chez Ivy, J performed at Karen's Castle. The music was like Della Reece, Shirley Basseyy. Her's were Petula Clarke and Dusty Springfield. She looked like Dusty Springfield and modeled herself on her. And Dionne Warwick – Dionne went to the Purple Onion where she met Robert Helpmann	Karen's Castle Della Reece, Shirley Basseyy Petula Clarke Dusty Springfield Dionne Warwick Purple Onion Robert Helpmann
0201	Purple Onion opened on Sunday night. Nothing else open and show people would come. People like Dusty Springfield.	Purple Onion

0238	To get jobs in shows you went on a Sunday and performed in guest spots. Most places had this arrangement. She got a job at the Onion when one of the girls left and was asked to replace her.	
0325	Was shy when she came to Sydney but on stage was a different person – “was the person I could be”. Describes how she stayed in the background socially – “forgettable” frightening about opening her mouth and saying the wrong thing. “When the music started I got lost in the performance”.	
0510	J describes a show dressed as puppets and the skill and hard work to make 30 second costume changes.	
0725	Purple Onion was another milk bar. You dressed in the window. The stage was almost at the entrance. There were curtains all round and all these lights. It was like an “L” shape and the costumes hung on another “L” shape on the other side of the door.	Purple Onion
0858	There were six performers using this tiny dressing room and had to work together.	
0956	Drama queens of note. Rose Jackson comes to mind, David Williams, Kandy Johnson. “The egos it was hard to rise above” – so you never bothered.	Rose Jackson David Williams Kandy Johnson
1106	A good drag queen? Your choice of numbers is what makes it work. You have to choose a voice that suits you, one that is believable.	
1212	Lip synching or singing? J sang when she performed in Brisbane but in Sydney there was no venue where there was a piano or microphone – all lip synching.	Brisbane Lip Synching
1253	Clientele were a small group of regulars every couple of nights or every week. They would bring in their straight friends.	
1336	Jimmy Fishburn was the director and he used to bring people there. Jimmy introduced J to Johnny O’Keefe at a friend’s party.	Jimmy Fishburn Johnny O’Keefe
1415	That’s how she met Jeannie Little. Jeannie met Barry (?Little) at the Purple Onion and married him.	Jeannie Little Purple Onion
1526	Tells of Jeannie sending her a bunch of apricot roses when she had been bashed.	
1546	J elaborated. She had been bashed with a brick. An American sailor had been given her address by a friend of hers. After a BBQ she came home with her. When he got up in the morning he went out into the backyard and got a brick and bashed her. The story was that he wasn’t gay! He went to gaol for 6 months. He tried to kill J – strangle her and cut the phones. “You lose trust. No trust anymore.	
1924	Rough trade. There were places everywhere. Rex Hotel. Sailors would come up from the docks nearby. Places like Les Girls were open until 3am.	Rex Hotel Rough Trade Les Girls

2011	There was the Birdcage. It ran the same time at the Purple Onion.	
2111	J talks about the fires at the Birdcage. Caused by the BBQ place downstairs.	Birdcage
2154	Karen's Castle was on Cleveland Street opposite a carpet warehouse. Behind it was a garage. She remembers some one coming in and bashing someone with a tyre lever in the audience. Thinks it closed after that. Everyone ran. Then worked at Ivy's then the Purple Onion, the Birdcage and then the Curry House on George Street (now called the Soup Kitchen) It was downstairs. A tiny room, but a good room. No stage.	Karen's Castle Chez Ivy Purple Onion Birdcage Curry House Soup Kitchen
2402	When working at the Curry House became a centerfold in POL. Believes she was the only centerfold. J tells the story of how she arrived distressed at a party. One of the people there worked for POL. She was 32 at the time.	Curry House POL
2720	Names of the Group at the Curry House. Tracey Diamond (deceased) was Queen of Diamonds, Pepper Stevens was the Queen of Spades and Judy was the Queen of Hearts.	Curry House Tracey Diamond Pepper Stevens
28:55	Name. The dentist took her to a party. He said, "If you don't look any good you won't be going to the party. I won't take you". In Brisbane her name was Bridgett Burnett. When she came to Sydney and hadn't worn drag, this guy who had a thing for Judy Garland said she was Judy Burnett. When at Capriccio's she ended up with Kitten Burnett, because she wasn't overdressed.	Kitten Burnett
3110	When she was doing spots at the Carousel, people thought she was a woman. They looked at her body but not her face.	Carousel
3204	After the Curry House there was (?) Kellions on Bondi Beach. Again down a hall but into a huge complex.	Curry House Kellions
3314	That's when she found out about drugs. J describes her first LSD trip.	
3805	The drug scene amongst the show girls had been going on for some time but they didn't allow her in, because they thought she couldn't cope. But she believed that she was the only one in the group who could cope.	
3920	Compares the violence in the 60s and 70s to today. Not a lot compared to today. A lot of people who came were straight and there were a lot of gay and straight friendships. More acceptance than today. Today the bashings are religion based.	
4107	J explains why she thinks she is gay. Her father was a returned serviceman who had been severely traumatized by a particular wartime experience. When he returned he was very distant from J and the other children.	
4240	J brought up younger sister and brother. When there was a fight she would protect her siblings and always copped it (bashing). He taunted "Out of the way poofter". Believes lack of masculine tension made J become what she has become.	

4600	J believes that these experiences have made it easier for people to open up to her.	
4625	Still looks in the mirror and sees a man.	
4657	Claudia is a man who used to wear dresses occasionally. She met Ivy (Richter) through Claudia and Irwin who worked in the hair dressing salon next to Chez Ivy.	Claudia Ivy Richter Irwin Chez Ivy
4900	J explains her "orphans' Christmas" where friends turn up with a plate and a \$10 gift. They are people who can't go home.	
5000	After Kellion's there was the Carousel. This was the old Les Girls venue. She made 3 sets of costumes (3 shows) for the whole cast. 1975 -1977.	Kellions Carousel Les Girls
5258	Worked full time at the Carousel making costumes. It was a hard time – break up with boyfriend and the bashing. All energy into working during the day at Bondi Junction for Ray Wilson.	Carousel Bondi Junction Ray Wilson
5342	Then making costumes for Capriccio shows, then performed at Capriccio's with the "Stray Girls". Upstairs making costumes – towards the end of Capriccio's.	Capriccio's Stray Girls
5443	The fire – person who owned Carousel was the person who bought out Caps. This is when the fire started and it closed.	Carousel
5538	The story of how the fire started. A neon sign outside a window and a spark flew through the window and set fire to a pile of costumes under a piano.	Fire at Caps
5626	J describes the state of her dressing room area 10 feet from the alleged source of the fire. It was damaged by heat and smoke. Very weird.	
5753	The loss included angel costume wings 12 foot across. When J walked they gave the impression of flying. Clear beading on nude illusion. Other losses were hair, jewellery, shoes.	
5935	Losses also occur when a venue is declared bankrupt, even though the costumes are the performers.	
5954	It was not a good living. Tax wasn't paid. Cash in hand	Wages
10043	At the time of the change from pounds to dollars the wage was £38 per week. Out of that you had to pay for high heeled shoes, stockings, lipstick, make up, costumes and have your hair done. It cost a week's wages to get your hair done.	Costs
10135	You had to make another wage. At the Carousel (1975) it was \$175 per week. Two shows a night. Friday Saturday 3 shows. Only Monday off.	Carousel Wages
10238	She was lucky she made her own costumes and made them for other people.	
10300	Worked at the Sydney Theatre Company making costumes. A permanent job for 4 ½ years. Richard Wherret was director of STC. There was a show (held in 1998) called the 30 years of drag and Richard was surprised Judy looked so good.	Sydney Theatre Company Richard Wherret 30 yrs of drag

10350	After the STC she worked on Phantom of the Opera, Grease, the Arena spectacular, 42 <sup>nd</sup> Street, Boy from Oz (as dresser).	Phantom of Opera Grease, Arena 42 <sup>nd</sup> Street Boy from Oz
10425	At STC J was wardrobe mistress at the Opera House, then on tour with people like Ruth Cracknell	STC Ruth Cracknell
10438	J talks about friendship with Ruth.	
10547	Has worked on the Producers making costumes and re-beading them.	Producers
10614	Can't recall police raids. Tells a story of walking in Stanley Street and being given a helpful ride by concerned police.	Stanley Street