

Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Elizabeth Bessell-Browne and Branco

Gaica

Interviewer: John Witte and Gavin Harris

Date of interview: 27 October 2016

Location of interview: Pitt Street, Redfern

Reason for interview: First Mardi Gras parade

Restrictions: None



Time	Summary	Key words
0120	Libby went to the first parade to meet up with their friend David Eyles (deceased). In 1978 she was living in Surry Hills would see David regularly. Branco was from the Northern Suburbs and met David through her. They went to the gay venues in Oxford Street and earlier had gone to the Purple Onion in Kensington. They had many gay friends. Libby grew up in Northbridge, her father was a banker and they went to Temora, then back to Narrabeen. She moved to inner city when she went to university. Shared with Julian Halls, David and Juliet. She worked as a journalist at Readers' Digest and later at Consolidated Press in Park Street around 1978.	David Eyles; Surry Hills; Oxford Street; Purple Onion; Northbridge; Narrabeen; Julian Hall; Reader's Digest; Consolidated Press;
0412	Libby had bought a house in Surry Hills and David would visit often. On the night of the first mardi gras, David called to arrange to meet at Taylor Square – there was going to be a parade. Branco thinks it was a demonstration.	Surry Hills; David Eyles; Taylor Square; mardi gras; demonstration;
0500	At Taylor Square David was not to be seen. When people moved, Branco and Libby moved with them.	Taylor Square;
0545	Branco's parents were post war refugees who settled in Warriewood and had a market garden. He grew up on the northern beaches of Sydney in the surfie culture. He went to Mona Vale Primary and Pittwater High School. The schools were a meeting point of migrant farmers' children and Anglo kids from Pittwater.	Warriewood; Mona Vale Primary School; Pittwater High School; Pittwater;
0720	Went to Tech and did a surveying course. Branco met Libby through a classmate at Tech around 1970. He had not met a gay guy until he met Libby's gay friends. And they became his friends and they socialised. Fancy dress and house parties.	House parties;
0910	Branco left Australia in 1974 and lived in Greece for three years. He became involved in a theatre scene with ex-pats and began photographing ballet and shows.	Greece; photography; ballet;
0935	Returns to Australia in 1977 and worked for Australian Ballet, Australian Opera, Sydney Theatre Company as a photographer. There was a big gay scene there.	Australian Ballet; Australian Opera; Sydney Theatre Company;
1034	David Eyles became close. Dinner three times a week at La Boheme in Crown Street.	La Boheme; Crown Street;
1100	David told Branco there was going to be a "protest march". Libby and Branco say "the word mardi gras was never used". Branco took his camera to take some shots. A Nikon with a flash and two rolls of film. He took photos of people around him.	Protest march;
1235	People were protesting, saying slogans – "stop police attacks on gays, women and blacks", "out of the bars into the streets",	Slogans;
1250	Branco believes it got bigger as it went down the street. People between bars would join. The feeling was festive. They were told they had a licence to go to Hyde Park corner. He was not aware of any arrangements of how it was going to stop.	Gay bars; Hyde Park;
1330	At Hyde Park the mood became "boisterous". Someone said "Let's go down College Street/to Kings Cross". In Branco's mind it was to extend it. The road (College Street) was blocked and the Mardi Gras was making a scene.	Hyde Park; College Street; Kings Cross; mardi gras;

1420	A policeman there was pointing to the right (see photograph) for the crowd to go "back into the park, up Park Street". People said "Let's go to Kings Cross". To keep the momentum going.	Park Street; Kings Cross;
1505	They went up College, then up William Street. "I don't remember any aggro from the police, they were just trying to herd cats really". He can't recall any police presence intimidating anybody, it was still peaceful.	College Street; William Street; Police;
1540	Libby recalls in Oxford Street, one cop on the kerb, quietly smiling. "Completely not hostile". She was not aware of the police until she got to the El Alamein fountain. The people and the police were bunched up. More police had arrived.	Oxford Street; El Alamein Fountain; Police;
1615	Branco thinks the police had decided to call it quits at the fountain. They had barricaded/blocked it (using police and a couple of paddy wagons) and people could not go anywhere. "Just like a stalemate".	Paddy wagons;
1650	Branco remembers the police saying "you guys have got to disperse". "All hell broke loose because a bunch of dykes just picked up garbage bins and started throwing them at the police". (Libby) "then the police just waded in" (Branco) "the police began arresting people". He says that up until that point it was quite docile until the women became militant.	Lesbians; Garbage bins; police;
1730	People were being arrested and other people were grabbing the arrestees. "It went amuck". People then went to the police station. Libby and Branco went to the police station and were outside chanting for an hour or two. No one was released. A peaceful protest.	Darlinghurst Police Station;
1830	Branco did not take photos of the arrests. He was not a photojournalist and they were up against the glass walls observing. They were not close enough and it was crowded.	
1950	He does not remember the police as being aggressive. "They were trying to restore order".	Police;
2010	Can't recall the incident over the truck, which was left in the street.	
2030	Branco remembers a Bolshoi dancer friend from Athens on the side of the road. Maris Liepa but they don't remember seeing anyone from the scene.	
2150	David Isle's excuse was that he had met someone in a bar and didn't turn up. No one understood the significance of the night at the time.	David Isle;
2220	(Branco is shown photos taken in Forbes Street, near the police station which may have been his)	Forbes Street;
2300	Branco and Libby remember a guy with a Citroen car in Forbes Street, and people began kicking his car. He honked his horn at them. "Some gay guy said 'fucking straight'". He was just trying to get through. He got out of the car and left his in neutral and it rolled and smashed into a parked car. Branco will need to find the negs.	Forbes Street; Citroen car;
2500	Libby and Branco look through the photos. "Branco 02" of the flat top at College Street. Couple of police. The pope and two layabouts with him. Were close to Branco and Libby in the parade in Oxford Street. "Branco 10" man in taffeta. Then outside Darlinghurst Police Station. They remember the crowd chanting and clapping. Photo of crowd at El Alamein fountain, again people chanting and clapping. (Branco) "It was jolly up until that time".	Truck; Taffeta; Oxford Street; Darlinghurst Police Station; El Alamein Fountain;
3100	Gavin asks if there were police and paddy wagons visible in William Street and was there any crowd control. They were not aware of this. The march moved freely up William Street.	Paddy wagons; William Street;
3225	Libby was only aware of aggression by the police at the El Alamein fountain. Some in the group (demonstrators) were spoiling for a fight. Branco agrees. They wanted it to be more of a protest. Libby saw "heavy political people" in the crowd and other	El Alamein fountain; protestors;

	people there for fun and to have their voices heard. Both saw people in the crowd attack the police at the end and police react very violently.	
3445	Branco could not remember the police just grab anybody. They grabbed those who were militant. "... pushing the police or throwing things or whatever."	Police;
3620	JW shows two photos one by Branco and one from News Ltd that appear to be the same scene. Closer examination of Branco's photo shows it is from College Street, and the other has "ice-creams" in the background – different events.	
3840	At College and Park there wasn't a big police presence. The protesters would have walked past the lone policeman.	College Street; Park Street;
3935	At College Street Branco was ahead of the crowd.	College Street;
4020	The crowd was "headless". Libby can't recall people on megaphones calling on people to go to the cross.	
4120	Libby and Branco had no involvement in the post-parade protests. Branco did not process the film for a long time after.	
4155	They were at a dinner party a couple of years later and Branco was urged to process the film and he then printed some from his proof sheet. There are photographs that have never been seen.	
4615	News Limited coverage the next day.	
5035	Branco had taken photos of the Sydney Theatre Company play "Normal Heart". He remembers names of friends among the list of names on the set.	"Normal Heart";
5230	Summary of what was said earlier.	
5345	Branco had heard of police suggestion of a fun parade in the early years and the police said they would support them.	Police;
5700	The 78ers in front of Mardi Gras banner.	