

Interview with **Ken (Kandy) Johnson** on the 26th and the 28th November 2005 at Crown Street, Woolloomooloo. The interviewer was John Witte.



Time	Subjects	Keywords
	File Kandy 1	
000115	Kandy was born in Petersham NSW on 8/11/35. Family, mother, father, 2 older brothers and a married step sister from father's previous marriage. Went to school in Petersham and Canterbury Boys High School.	Petersham Canterbury Boys High School
000230	Memories of sex with older boy when he was 7.	
000305	Pretty good at school, but didn't study.	
000455	K. sees himself as "sissy looking" in family photos. He was always gregarious, campy, popular. Unaware what his aunt's comments about him making a fine window dresser when he was 14 was all about. He had ambitions to be an "actor or whatever". Parents didn't push their children intellectually.	
000700	No notable friendships at school. Friendships with the local kids in the neighbourhood.	
000927	Got Intermediate Certificate and couldn't leave school quick enough and earn own money.	
001000	K. describes group wank at school and discovering masturbation at 15 years of age.	
001036	First job with WD and HO Wills in City. 3 or 4 years as a clerk.	WD and HO Wills
001138	Learned accountancy at night to get the best money he could, then got a job in Botany in a construction company.	
001245	Worked there until discovered by Dr Darcy Croll, his first boyfriend and benefactor. D. gave K. a job in his company "Industrial Medical Service" that went around to factories.	Dr Darcy Croll Industrial Medical Service
001319	K. describes the reasons for success of IMS which was a pioneering venture.	
001413	K. was employed as the Safety Officer. He was 19. (1954) He had to put in safety measures to prevent accidents.	
001615	The job put K. in D.'s arms once a week . K. was 19 looking 12 and D. was 45.	
001700	He had met D. through someone K. met on a beat, who took him to D's house in Neutral Bay. At that stage D. was K's first gay relationship.	
001723	Called up for National Service when he was 22. Initially he was harassed and K. describes an incident.	National Service
001828	They would say derogatory camp things to K who didn't understand what they meant. E.g. Back Bar of the Rex.	Back Bar of the Rex
001831	After a week or two he got through and they treated him as a mascot. He became more outrageous. Describes tough	

	guys carrying his rifle.	
001925	After he was accepted, a fellow soldier, Allan told K. he was queer too. "He had been in the business and was not as outrageous" as K.	Allan
001752	A. took K. to the back bar of the Rex. K. describes how his knowledge of the gay world suddenly changed. He saw men his age, gorgeous and happy.	Allan Back Bar of Rex
002018	D. didn't like this – K was at the backbar of the Rex and not with him.	
002050	For K this was the focus on Friday and Saturday nights. There was also Pfahlerts (for the 9 to 5s in the city), Ushers and the Australia back bar (occasionally)	Pfahlerts Ushers Australia Bar Bar
002123	The commercial bars knew that if they could make that part of the bar, gay it was fine.	
002205	Ushers was in town. Saloon Bar. (Public Bar was where the prices were fixed.) Lawyers and chiefs were in the Saloon Bar – filtered out the cheaper drinkers. It was important to have a friendly bar maid. We ignored them (straights) and they ignored us.	Saloon Bars Public Bars
002332	Pfahlerts. Whereas Ushers was beer and gin and tonic, P. was pimms, cocktails, leisurely, bit more screamy, possibly a queen's bar. Solicitors and Real Estate Agents.	Pfahlerts Ushers
002443	Then came 10pm closing. Before then after the pubs closed there were coffee shops.	
002517	With 10pm closing everyone went to the Rex Hotel. K never went into town again. Going to town was a "scene".	Rex Hotel
002558	Can't remember music in hotels – just the buzz of the pub. All male. K can't remember a lesbian scene at that time (mid 50's).	
002639	Coffee shops. K went to the Kashmir but not very often. The Kashmir was known to straights in National Service.	Kashmir
002839	Was called "Kandy" during National Service. He did not have a gay name before then. Candy because he was sweet? And C became K because his name was Ken. And then through Allen projected to gay world.	Allen
003000	After NS back to work with Darcy. D disliked "effervescent" queens K was mixing with. They had "no agenda". K became more campy and prone to sex. Relationship became strained.	Darcy
003200	Looses his job with Darcy.	Darcy
003315	Bought a house at Thirroul with brother and there was income from there.	Thirroul
003357	Decided to become a Personnel Officer, but his friends were going to Europe and decided to be part of it.	Personnel Officer
003513	K recalls that his father was sick before he went over seas but nobody mentioned why. He planned to be away 3 months but worked and stayed 9. His mother telegraphed him that his father was sick and asked him to come home. Difficult to get back. His father died of prostate cancer	

	before he got home. Doesn't know why family didn't tell him earlier. Came home.	
003748	Back into gay circles. Met Dormie Mclvor, a window dresser and became close friends.	Dormie Mclvor
003810	Did Personnel Officer course at Sydney Technical College and got a job at Marrickville as Employment Officer for 3 years whilst he did the course.	Sydney Technical College Marrickville
003829	Dormie got inspiration to open (Purple Onion) and in the meantime the Jewel Box had opened.	Purple Onion Jewel Box
003900	K was doing party pieces in drag. E.g. The Pregnant Bride mimed to Jane Powell's "Too late now". Worked with Charlie (Kate) Carney in a show at Surf City (site of Crest Hotel in KX). There was Kate and her boyfriend in corsets miming "We are just 2 little girls from Little Rock" and K did the Pregnant Bride. Bopping surfies did not want to know about the show and talked amongst themselves.	Jane Powell Charlie Kate Carney
004114	To retain the liquor licence you had to have a "performance" before midnight and after midnight, with 3 or more people. Cheapest they could get was drag.	Liquor Licence
004219	Jewel Box opened. Guest spots. Carlotta, Lombard and Elektra performed. It was rough. Sailors, shirt lifters from gaol. Run by Lee Gordon and wife Aileen. Very low brow for Lee.	Jewel Box Carlotta, Lombard, Elektra, Lee and Aileen Gordon
004317	The liquor courts agreed to 'mimed' drag queens as a floor show. Up until the Jewel Box performers had to sing and have an orchestra. The (musicians) union was strong. Drag queens lip synched and were paid £10.	Liquor Laws Jewel Box
004416	Sammy Lee and Reg Boom said whacko and so did Dormie and Barry Day and Bobby Wood. Dormie had looked at the future Les Girls premises to do it like the Coconut Grove. They had no backer and K thought that the gangsters would eat them alive.	Sammy Lee Reg Boom Dormie Mclvor Barry Day Bobby Wood
004529	Dormie and K looked at a coffee shop in Kensington called "Mad, Mad World". It had been sub leased to a theatrical company call "The Committee". They put on plays. Dormie opened up the Purple Onion (PO). 6 months later Lee and Boom opened up Les Girls.	Mad, Mad World The Committee Purple Onion Les Girls
004630	Sammy Lee complained that "the pooftas" didn't turn up to Les Girls as he hoped. It was too expensive thinks K. Whereas at the PO you paid an entry fee and it was BYOG.	Sammy Lee Les Girls
004700	The gay layer that Boom and Lee were expecting were the ones who went to the Jewel Box after the Rex had closed. Instead the PO took these people.	Boom and Lee Jewel Box Purple Onion
004821	K believes that queens are not known to fork out money to see something. They maybe went once a month with straight friends to Les Girls.	Les Girls
004925	In those days they thought that if it was run by queens it should be cheaper.	
005018	When Les Girls opened the "GP" numbers like Elektra,	Elektra

	Lombard and Carlotta left the Jewel Box and worked at LG and the JB went down the ranks.	Lombard Carlotta Jewel Box
005040	Nobody came after the opening of LG. The show was lavish. There was no publicity. No gay papers. Relied on word of mouth from the drag artists.	Les Girls opening
005156	Dormie, Barry and Bobbie opened PO. Never monetarily successful. Came in with little capital. They only took the £ at the door. Didn't sell drinks. Jimmy Fishburn put on a 2 show policy taken from the night clubs. However, after the first show people would not move. Tough criminal numbers would say "we're not paying" and the show would be delayed. K became disheartened. People came and it was successful. Sunday nights were the most successful. Jimmy Fishburn put on a 6 pm show. This idea was from the Stage Club at Cronulla/Sylvania. JF was a drag queen in those shows, as was Tracey Lee and Freddie Fox who became milliner to the Royals. Sundays was a success because people went to beach during the day, had a quick shower and went out to Purple Onion.	Dormie, Barry and Robbie Purple Onion Jimmy Fishburn Cronulla/Sylvania Tracey Lee Freddie Fox
005438	Production costumes would be born by the club. Drag queens supplied their own costumes and spent lavishly.	
005539	K would go to rehearsals, go to Tech and arrive half hour before the show started, do a show and leave immediately after.	
005635	Didn't like not being in control. Having to cope with work, tech, and delayed show times.	
005715	Leaving was hard because he loved the applause.	
005718	Carlotta came and said "Sammy wants you" and K was in the opening show at LG.	Carlotta Sammy Les Girls
005746	Sammy Lee was pzazzy, Reg Boom mixed in the tough world of illegal casinos. Came out and punched Elektra. "Bloody ugly poofta now get out. You are bringing down the tone of the place." Pushed her down the back stairs. K rang Sammy the next day and said he wasn't used to that "fucking poofta" bit and left.	Sammy Lee Reg Boom Elektra
005920	No intention of going back to the "Purple Banana" as Sammy called it. It was struggling.	
005930	Then a year later Jimmy Fishburn took the entire cast from PO and put them in a commercial setting called 8 Belles. Dormie had to get new people.	Jimmy Fishburn Purple Onion Eight Belles
005943	In the meantime K would open own club, Kandy's Garden of Eden (KGE) at Enmore. Had Simone (who had not worked commercially) Nola from the Onion.	Kandys Garden of Eden Simone (Troy) Nola
	File Kandy 2	
000010	Opened KGE. Relied on word of mouth. (Crackle)	Kandy's Garden of Eden
000100	Dita Cobb clicked it for KGE. She was a columnist, sort of lesbian and turned up with her "boyfriend" Kay a woman in	Dita Cobb Kay

	a suit smoking a pipe. She mentioned KGE in her column. Doorperson Margaret took time off and K's mother worked on the door. She loved it and queens loved the idea. She stayed.	Margaret (door person) Mother
000258	Maitre de was Jackie George who had done the lights for the Kiwis a stage show during WWII. K digresses and mentions that Jackie's Japanese boyfriend was recently told that he could not claim a war widows pension.	Jackie George Kiwis stage group
000418	K tells an short story about Jackie announcing Helpman and Nureyev in the audience to the cast. (Crackle) Later Sir Robert Helpman was pally with Dawn O'Donnell.	Robert Helpman Nureyev Dawn O'Donnell
000509	Rose came over from the PO and KGE shot forward. Peter Manahan, a window dresser friend did the décor. Multicoloured ceiling, papier mache tree trunks branches across the roof. Apples hung from them.	Rose (Jackson) Peter (Molly) Manahan
000601	No liquor licence, but cops came in and told him to remove the shrubbery. No bribes, so they weren't interested.	
000643	Went well for a year and PO went down.	Purple Onion
000658	Shows at KGE were based on comedy. Simone was ultra glamorous. Nola played Bette Davis Elaine Stritch severe. There was the "all girl" band who parodied "Hold that Tiger"	Kandys Garden of Eden, Simone, Nola Bette Davis
000806	K began compering. There was an amateur hour on Sundays like the PO. Christie from Campsie and Paula from Punchbowl and Melanie from Manly.	Amateur hour
000955	Put on "all girl band" at PO.	Purple Onion
001016	Had to put on a new show every 6 weeks, 2 shows nightly because people came so regularly.	
001043	K's style was visual comedy, and cast added to it all the time.	
001138	After K did the show at the PO. It was suggested he go back to the PO.	Purple Onion
001226	The lease was up on KGE. He closed it and joined Dormie at the PO.	Kandy's Garden of Eden
001242	Partnership. Things were done on a handshake. Costumes were pooled. Dormie looked after the money. K produced the shows. Joined the casts. Nola wouldn't go back. Added Robyn Bowtell and Dorrelle from the Onion - there was Simone, Rose Jackson and K from the KGE. Simone went to LG.	Dormie Nola, Robyn Bowtell, Dorrelle, Rose Jackson
001411	Things were tight. There was a falling out between Dormie and K over money and Dormie just stopped coming in. K took over for 4 years.	Dormie
001634	People were packed in. Men couldn't dance together. They could dance with a lesbian.	
001719	K said that was because police would find it "offensive".	
001818	Licensing police would come in even though PO had no licence. K would turn on the cleaning lights.	Licensing Police
001914	K made a decision that men could dance together.	

002010	Celebrities who came in late would be seated in front of the regulars and this caused problems.	
002110	Nureyev not interested in show. There to pick up.	Nureyev
002159	Comedy material was from "Around the Horn". Jimmy Colebrook worked for a record company and supplied much material. K had a network in the ABC. Jimmy got the who series of "Around the Horn" and K worked his way through it. K explains how he edited material down from 20 mins to seven mins. If it didn't get a laugh he would cut it out. Sometimes without consultation. The audience was none the wiser.	Around the Horn Jimmy Colebrook ABC
002534	At the Onion editing was "quick and lively". Previous to this people would have to do the whole record. A bit much after one week.	Purple Onion
002620	K got a bee in the bonnet about being a publican.	
	File Kandy 3	
000027	K got the bug to become a publican. Probably thought that there would be money in it and felt that PO could go on its own. His solicitor advised him to step back from the PO because it was hard enough getting a licence because he was unmarried and homosexual. So decided to sell. Criminals were not interested because there was no liquor licence and they were not interested in gay venues at that stage. In the US mafia ran the gay world. PO was a personality business (his).	Purple Onion
000219	His solicitor introduced David Williams to him and K talks about the conditions for the sale. DW offered \$1500 Or \$2000	David Williams
000359	DW was absolutely right for PO. K tells how he pushed DW forward as star of the show. When K came back from holidays DW didn't need him. Took PO to new heights for 2 or 2 ½ years. DW moved on.	David Williams
000505	DW or his friend turned PO into a disco. Not a success. It was too early for go to a dance place. It was decorated with concrete and creosoted timber. "Just stank". Bee came back from America and attempted to re-open it, but cast had gone to Ivy's Birdcage (IB). "Ivy was reasonably generous with money" and the Birdcage went forward.	David Williams Ray Seidy
000711	K put on a couple of shows there (IB) after a 3 month break. People liked going back to the madness of the drag show. K's comedy spot was the flying nun.	
000753	The Lord Roberts did not do well at all.	Lord Roberts Hotel
000804	K got the publican's licence despite objections – he was unmarried and dressed as a woman.	
000901	The Lord Roberts was a hard pub to sell. It had a "Head Lease" – the brewery did not own the premises.	Head Lease Lord Roberts Hotel
000932	Jim Maloney a.k.a. Carpet Bag Maloney, was in charge of licensing in this (East Sydney) district and it was he who objected.	Jim Carpet Bag Maloney
000954	K had no idea how to run a pub. Had to pay someone who	Purple Onion

	would be a paid housekeeper and her husband who would run the cellar. Also worked at the PO. Started to drink.	
001051	When he learned to do the beer he got rid of the manager and his wife. But there was no money.	
001102	K went on the stage at LR and it was packed, but the bar was small. Put in a publican went overseas and they did quite well.	
001204	Prior to going overseas a friend suggested he open a steam bath. K was sceptical. "Cops won't let it work"	
001303	Stan Monroe had left Les Girls and K did a week compering and asked to stay by Sammy Lee.	Stan Monroe
001342	When he came back the person who sold him into the Lord Roberts suggested the Park Inn Hotel (PIH) near Centennial Park. The publican was from the Duncan family – Carmen Duncan's brother, Robert.	Lord Roberts Park Inn Hotel Duncan family
001450	They swapped licences. About 1970. The PIH provided K with a large room to put on shows. Called it Kandy's Park Inn. He had a RSL show called Kandy and Spice and put this on Fridays and Saturdays. Put on another drag and it got fuller. His friend Bruce Wormald had a band and K sang with them on Tues. On Monday sometimes Queeny Paul performed. She was about 70 and a Tivoli Star. The dykes loved her. K's first lesbian clientele.	Kandys Park Inn Hotel Kandy and Spice Bruce Wormald Queeny Paul Tivoli
001716	The queens didn't come to the pub. Prostitutes, nurses, sailors, hoons did. Public bar stayed the same. Nobody mixed. Good clientele from nearby motorbike mechanic.	
001848	Violence started. Bouncers ended up being criminals.	
001934	Went overseas. His manager ran the pub very well. Carlotta performed and she was a great success.	Carlotta
002034	His friend Kate Carney had an idea for a Graffiti Bar. The Saloon Bar was decorated with movie posters and people could write what they liked. Had a boy dancing on bar – but you couldn't get to the customers. Many complaints with noise. Located near Neville Wran's house. Brewery stepped in and said K had no permission to re-design the bar. Cops stepped in and said it was "offensive" to them.	Kate Carney Graffiti Bar Neville Wran Brewery
002439	Carlotta left for LG. K pulled down posters and the Saloon Bar business "died in the bum".	Carlotta
002538	Crims liked working as bouncers. It gave them a money packet whilst still running prostitutes.	
002604	There was a blow up with the cops. Two 18 yo boys had moved in whilst he was away. One was a poofter basher but charming to everyone at the pub. The other boy was a nephew of the policeman who arrested K. K felt that he was being targeted.	
002801	Before this, K thought he would open a steam bath. Couldn't get a sauna license. Council would say it was going to be a brothel. He saw a gym for lease above a shop in Randwick. Put in a sauna and a steam room and traded as Kens Karate Klub (KKK) in Alison Street. This	Randwick Council Kens Karate Klub

	opened when the blow up with the cops happened.	
002915	K thought the fight was too hard. Brewery gave K a week to week lease because of charge pending.	Brewery
002944	Unsigned statement (of Kandy stating that he had gotten off with the boys) was admitted to lower court as evidence, but not admitted in the higher court. This statement was false and didn't happen. The cop's nephew did not appear in court. Kandy spent a night in gaol. There was no case against him.	
003124	Concentrated on steam bath. Complaints from the shops below about the steam and heat. Had no money to do it up after the brewery screwed him.	
003300	K gives reasons why police and brewery did not like him.	
003313	Dawn O'Donnell (DOD) who was probably with Abe at that time (JW c. 1970-73) and came to see him at the pub. She was going to apply for licence for Purple Onion and asked K to do shows. Council knocked her back.	Dawn O'Donnell Abe Saffron Purple Onion Randwick Council
003450	K got on well with the landlord of the Onion and he helped K buy the premises. K had only got \$25,000 from the Brewery for PIH. He could turn it into a steam bath because he could transfer the sauna licence within the Randwick Council.	Randwick Council Purple Onion
003604	K met a policeman who he knew and who knew the Randwick mayor and he spoke for K's application	
003647	Had a concept for a steam bath from Muslim countries. A meditation pool in middle and terraces on either side and balconies you could look over. It was an instant success.	
003756	While he was overseas, Dawn had partnered up with "that boy" and opened up Bondi Steam. The whole complex belonged to Abe Saffron.	Dawn O'Donnell Abe Saffron
003825	Roger Claude opened up King Steam toward the end of K's tenure at KKK. 253 opened about the same time by Roger Claude's boyfriend.	Roger Claude King Steam 253 Sauna
004000	K tells the story of how Dr Anne Walker began doing outreach work at KKK and how 253 owner spread word that KKK was so rife with syphilis it had to have a Doctor present.	Dr Anne Walker KKK 253
004147	K describes the atmosphere at KKK as jovial. He constantly changing the décor. His brother was a carpenter.	KKK
004340	In contrast to K, he says that one of the gangster things was to spend the money to open a venue, but then take the money and don't do anything not maintain them.	
004401	His mother dies. K buys a house at Noosa and had people running KKK. People would say "You're not just a drag queen, you're a money queen". Decided to sell to David and Nick who ran the Roman Baths.	Noosa David and Nick Roman Baths
004545	A couple of years later got the bug to go back on stage. Took on the Paddington Green (PG) – a disaster. The whole gay world had changed – "no community spirit".	Paddington Green Hotel Nannette and Leigh

	Nannette and Leigh at the Albury, the Beresford, Midnight Shift all pumping. The PG was too far, people stole from him and Simone Troy (partners). Lasted 18 months. Left for Noosa. Had to sell 2 houses (from sale of KKK) to get out of debt.	Albury Hotel Beresford Midnight Shift Simone Troy
004716	Kristal Pistol was before the Paddington Green. K decided to open a nightclub opposite Her Majesties in a building owned by Joe Borg a gangster. Advertising was word of mouth and not many came. Lasted 3 or 4 months. Put a show together for RSL's called Kandy and Spice and left. He had linked up with Dormie Mclvor for KP who did the Coconut grove décor – silver palm trees.	Kristal Pistol Joe Borg Kandy and Spice Dormie Mclvor
005028	Oxford Street wasn't "there" in those days.	
005045	When the gay pubs opened they knocked Capriccio's sideways. You went to Caps when the pubs closed at 10pm and drank in bottom bar from 10-12 until the show started.	12 O'clock closing Capriccios
005109	When pubs opened until 1200 Caps bottom bar floundered. They didn't have the money to subsidise the shows upstairs.	
005139	David Penfold and David Mitchell did the shows for Caps. Tommy Brown and Allan Miller. It was opened by DOD and Marg Hathaway. When Ivy's Birdcage had its 3 rd fire it destroyed Ivy completely. She had just put on a new show. Karen Chant was the lead. Faulty wiring by the electrician. DOD went to Maggie Martin the choreographer and told her to "keep the kids together". Six weeks later Caps opened and half Ivys cast went to Caps. DP and DM were quite sophisticated with their material. Rose Jackson probably did the costumes. "Zinger of a show".	David Penfold David Mitchell Tommy Brown Allan Miller Dawn O'Donnell Marg Hathaway Ivy (Richter) Karen Chant Maggie Martin Rose Jackson
005406	Change in style of K's performance. K says that it is fun for a man to get into drag. In Turkey he had to be serious drag to get (straight) people in. K says that tried and true comedy have just gone on. E.g. Carlotta's latest show – the pregnant bride and the fat lady. Vaudeville and sight gags. Monica Kelly's the drunken nun's 30 days of Christmas.	Carlotta Monica Kelly
005607	Virginia, the mother of K's son Aslan invented many things. Like "My favourite things" and the "Laziest girl in town".	Virginia
005742	People rely on the compere to be funny. If not done well it can be trying.	Compere
005837	K started out with vaudeville sight gags, then went on to talking. He became more glamorous drag at the pub when entertaining straights. They want something physical to make a mystery of it all.	
010015	The audience in Turkey are tourists. Opens with a big no., talk, comedy, talk and then change. There are 8 changes.	
010156	Sold Noosa and didn't have to work in Turkey. Hideous working conditions. Still visits Kusadasi and Virginia and Aslan in Sydney and Noosa.	Noosa Kusadasi Sydney

010430	Changes in the gay scene. Previously there was only Kandy and Dawn and now there are many straight owners.	
010504	K talks about PGH and about Nanette from the Albury complaining to the Police about K operating after hours. Felt that there was no community feel.	Paddington Green Hotel, Nanette from Albury
010637	AIDS crisis hits at the same time. People were not going out, due to fears. K was voted "Empress of Sydney" and used to visit the 17 th Floor. Some patients did not have any support.	AIDS Empress of Sydney 17 th Floor
010833	Matraya Day Centre was after the PGH and a stint in Brisbane and when K came to Sydney, Aslan was a teenager.	Matraya Day Centre Brisbane
010923	A lesson was learned from San Francisco where there were a lot of people without support. They started Shanti and Matraya was about the same thing.	San Francisco Shanti Matraya
011000	On Fridays Matraya prepared fresh meals for people.	Matraya
011124	K talks about Matraya's participation in the Mardi Gras parade and when threats were made against parade participants.	Mardi Gras
011328	Some regrets. Not standing up for people at the graffiti bar and taking the cops on. K was happy with what he was doing when he was boss. Did what was good and creative and made money along the way. Never hurt anyone.	
011520	Correction. The people who opened the PO were Dormie Mclvor, Bob Wood and Barry Day and Rose Jackson was in the second show.	Dormie Mclvor Bob Wood Barry Day Rose Jackson