

Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Roni McGarrigle

Interviewer: Terri Smithton

Date: 21 February 2005

Location of interview: Summer Hill

Reason for interview: Archival Project

Restrictions: N/A



Time	Summary	Keywords
0:39	Roni was born in 8/5/1956, in Port Glasgow in Scotland. Large family, father unemployed, mother house duties. Left home at 15	Port Glasgow
1:42	Came to Australia at 18 with her daughter to stay with sister. Most of family followed.	
2:18	First job public servant.	
2:32	First knew about lesbians in her hometown at 10-12-yrs-old. Then had crush on woman thought she was somehow different. Her first lover Dorrie.	
3:46	Became a Jehovah's Witness, but they don't like lesbians.	Jehovah's Witness
4:06	First met a political lesbian in 1977 at Women in Labour Conference. Came out then. Became a political lesbian, rather than just being political.	Pam Stein, Terri Smithton
5:46	Lived in Queensland in the Bjelke Petersen years. Bumped into MT. Sick of Sydney and stayed with dykes in Brisbane and they educated her.	MT, a 78er Bjelke Petersen
6:42	Describes 70/80's shared households in Queensland. Political activities. Time of Gay Liberation movement coming in to its own.	
7:30	Conferences attended, Gay, Women's, Women's Refuge, Welfare. Held around Australia.	
8:17	Describes Womens' Conferences and initial reaction to lesbians at them. Last Conference was Gay and Lesbian one in Brisbane in the 83 or 84. Remembers the Paedophilia issue at this conference as a brawl. People were confused on the issue. Describes her feelings toward paedophilia at the time. No place in the G & L movement and should form their own.	Gay and Lesbian Conference, Brisbane Paedophilia
10:43	Worked in different women's services during the 70's and 80's. And in youth refuges.	Elsie's Womens Refuge, Darwin Rape Crisis Centre, Brisbane Women's House, Stepping Out Housing, Youth Refuges at Bankstown, Hurstville,
11:25	Describes the Darwin scene in 1981 when she went there for a Women's Conference. The politically motivated women in Darwin were isolated from the rest of Australia. Lots of fun.	Darwin

12:46	Describes the Brisbane scene. Political upheaval. The women were known as singers. Learned a lot politically from them.	
13:38	Describes police harassment in Brisbane back then. Strip searches, arrested for “jay walking”, searching for evidence of spray can graffiti activity. Police surveillance was very tight. Gay men taken to remote cemeteries and warned. MT had her own cop at marches, who would arrest her. Special Branch’s head was John O’Gorman. The head of the Civil Liberties Union was his brother Terry.	MT Terry O’Gorman John O’Gorman Special Branch
16:22	Moved from Maryborough where she lived with her lover and their children for 3 1/2 years, in 1984-85 to Sydney.	Maryborough
16:53	Describes various women’s campaigns. Had come down from Darwin earlier about Violet Roberts and her son Bruce who were charged with the husband/father. Campaigned until they were released from gaol. Frank Walker was Attorney General and made a promise that this would not happen again, but it did, a month later with Georgina from Wollongong, Domestic Violence case. She was also released after a campaign. Other successes, Sandra Wilson who was a lesbian and sentenced to Governor’s Pleasure.	Violet and Bruce Roberts Frank Walker Georgina from Wollongong Sandra Wilson
19:00	Describes life in Sydney in the mid-80’s. Lesbians lived in Leichhardt and Glebe, in shared housing. Lesbian connection around Australia where you could stay. Lesbians moving around the country.	Leichhardt Glebe
20:25	Today, Roni says she doesn’t know people in other states. Everyone knew you, if you were lesbian in the 70’s/80’s. More acceptable way of being now. You can walk down the street holding hands with your girlfriend today. Can’t remember how many times she was bashed for being a lesbian by the cops.	
21:30	Describes fashion at the time – bib and brace overalls, jeans, t-shirts with a big political slogan across the front – Nicaragua, Ecuador, Women’s Health, Women’s Refuges. Short, spikey hair, flat tops.	
22:03	Describes venues – Ruby Reds – fun if you could get past the bouncer, very small place, every lesbian in Sydney went to it, always packed, played the music of the day, always met up with someone that you knew. The Playground – “the sand pit” in Elizabeth Street. Easier to get in. The bouncer at Ruby Reds would throw people down the stairs.	Ruby Reds The Playground
23:18	Compares venues of today. More today. In the past there was the Exchange and Patches. Women would get a hard time going to them. And men would get a hard time going to Rubies. Gays and lesbians didn’t mix. Today we have Lesbians on the Loose and more venues to meet up with people.	The Exchange Patches Lesbians on the Loose
24:37	Believes the changes have a lot to do with gay liberation. People put in the energy to get acceptance.	

25:03	Changes in homophobia – young people have more options, more discussion, Mardi Gras and Pride and more community organisations. In the past Refuges ran on 3 wages and 20 workers.	Mardi Gras Pride
26:33	Support from other organisations. Unions came across with bail money, but it was mostly the Quakers who were one of the first to work on homophobia within their group. Kids taught at school about homophobia.	Quakers
27:50	Talks about life at the moment. Feels good about being a lesbian and the changes that have taken place. You can talk about being a lesbian today. In the past you would get bashed/locked up or put into a mental institution.	
29:00	Describes overall feeling in the 70's – 80's – strong out loud lesbian who wanted to change the world. Not sure about changing the world but did change a couple of laws.	
29:15	Transport: Got about in a Motorbike Honda 400 4 Super Sport. A whole heap who rode bikes then. Workshop at Kim Banks's place and would ride together. Had an accident which stopped her riding. Unusual in those days to see a woman on a bike.	Kim Banks