

Pride History Group Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Paul O'Grady

Interviewer: John Witte

Focus of interview: Activism

Date of interview: Commenced 7th July 2012

Place of interview: Eastwood and Bar Beach, Newcastle

Conditions: None



Time	Subjects	Proper names
<i>Italics</i> = Contribution by interviewer John Witte, [Square brackets] = John Witte's assumption of what Paul meant.		
00:00	Paul's early childhood.	St Mary's Rydalmere; St Patrick's Dundas;
00:48	Father's occupation and mum's role in the family.	Parramatta;
01:22	Family politics.	Dan Mahoney;
02:21	Attitude towards school. St Patricks was "free ranging". Left School in year 10. School did not engage him.	St Patricks
03:13	Job in local supermarket.	Rydalmere;
03:30	Sexuality. Ideas and discussion in the home.	St Vincents Hospital;
04:35	Life away from home, the neighbourhood.	
05:25	Left home at 16 and lived in a gay relationship.	Parramatta;
06:49	He met his partner in the Labor Party.	Australian Labor Party;
07:06	First meeting in ALP in November or December 1975. Reasons he joined the ALP. He knew the Branch Secretary prior to joining.	
07:55	Partner also from a Catholic background.	
08:20	Joining the trade union movement. The union he joined was under attack from the Federally registered union. His union was talking about amalgamating with another union. The Federal body raided his union's membership and he tells how this happened.	Shop Branch, Australian Workers' Union; Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association; Building Workers Industrial Union;
09:10	He was a union organiser during this.	Barry Egan;
09:09	Describes Young Labor at this time. Names of people who had emerged or were emerging when he was there. His impressions of these people.	Pam Allen; John Whitehouse; John Faulkner;
10:20	Reasons why these people appealed to Paul. An idea of a tolerant, inclusive society.	Social Justice;
10:55	Homosexuals in the Labor Party. His homosexuality was never raised factionally.	
12:20	Industrial issues Paul was involved with. The takeover of his union. Pay roll deductions. Casualisation of shop employees. Insecure employment. Effect of this on employees.	Industrial Group (Grouper) Organisation; B.A. Santamaria;
13:40	He lost his job.	Barry Egan;
14:30	Late 70s gay activism and Mardi Gras. Provided a positive, different model. Paul talks about the effect of seeing others in the same position as himself, and people fighting injustice.	Mardi Gras; Max Pearce, Ken Davis;
16:44	People had a broad philosophical and political interest rather than being single issue.	
17:45	How Paul saw Law Reform at that time.	Law Reform; Maurie Kean; Frank Walker; Michael Egan; George Petersen;
18:55	Roman Catholic influence was stronger than today.	Roman Catholic Church;
19:17	Observations of the left. There was a socially conservative group.	ALP Left; Ray Wheeler; John Garland;

20:35	The right faction. Progressives like Barry Unsworth and conservatives like Johnno Johnson	Barry Unsworth; Johnno Johnson;
21:45	<i>Barry Unsworth background.</i> Paul describes him as intelligent and with the capacity to work through something.	Barry Unsworth;
23:00	<i>Interviewer talks about the politics of the early mardi gras.</i>	
24:20	Bill Whittaker's career. He worked for Neil Blewett before Jack Ferguson.	Bill Whittaker; Neil Blewett;
25:30	Paul replaced John Faulkner on Ken Booth's staff. Minister for Sport, Recreation and Tourism and then Treasurer under Wran.	John Faulker; Ken Booth; Wallsend;
26:05	Ken Booth introduced Paul to Newcastle. The importance of Co-Ops. Constituents would come to his home. An insight into the history of the ALP and the period of Evatt. Paul describes Wallsend, a working class suburb.	Ken Booth; Newcastle; Co-operatives; Herbert Vere (Bert) Evatt;
27:30	Paul describes how he was chosen as a Ministerial Staffer and the reason why he thinks he was selected.	Jack Ferguson;
29:05	Work in Ken Booth's Electorate Office. The staff. His job was tourism and casinos "working out where we go, what we do". Developing policy skills – how government reacts to different issues.	
30:45	Mardi Gras's lobbying to get no costs for the cops, the roads closed. Paul recalls attempting to convince Bob [Carr] of the worth of keeping the Hordern Pavilion in the Showground Re-Development.	Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras; Bob Carr; Hordern Pavilion;
32:00	Paul describes the Labor Government of 81-88 as an activist Government. The Catholic Church's position.	
33:45	Jack Ferguson's role. The art of the possible. Law reform gathered an "inevitability". Law reform fitted more into the Left's agenda. Individuals in each faction who championed different parts at different times.	Jack Ferguson
35:56	<i>What was holding Wran back?</i> Paul talks about factors that influenced the timing.	Neville Wran; Law Reform;
37:00	<i>JW raises the notion that lobbying, street protests had no influence.</i> Paul says change is incremental and these are parts of building the process of change.	Lobbying; Brian McGahen; Tony Reeves; Robert Tickner;
	Part 2 Bar Beach, Newcastle	
40:50	The interview goes back to Paul joining the ALP and leaving home. He did see himself as gay at that stage (1977) and it took a while for parents to "thaw". Moving out was part of the process.	Coming out;
43:00	1977 was period of Post-Gough Whitlam. The changing of the thought process and fundamental changes like Medibank happened under Gough. And these were under attack. He was politicised by the Gough period and coming of age. And outward looking Australia.	Gough Whitlam; Coming of age;
45:00	<i>How were these ideas developed?</i> Next door neighbour was local ALP Branch Secretary, but his parents would never have voted ALP. But there was a family trait, "you're here to make a contribution" plus the general milieu around him.	Local politics;
46:30	He never really connected to school, never found his niche. "Always in hurry". Joined the ALP and met his partner and this was important and the relationship stretched and supported him. And he developed his gay identity in that relationship. His circle of school mates and work colleagues were mostly straight. They went out as a gay couple.	His first relationship;
49:20	A gay bar had opened at Granville, Zodiacs near the station. In a shop next to a church. It was different from Oxford St. Not overcrowded and it was suburban.	Zodiacs; Granville;
51:00	<i>Homosexual Law Reform.</i> 1984. Hawke was elected. Greiner, first Catholic leader of the Liberal Party was emerging and politics were changing. Possibly the youngest parliament in NSW after the election.	Bob Hawke; Nick Greiner; George Petersen; Michael Yabsley; Fred Miller;

	Times were changing, although people like George Petersen was still there. Michael Yabsley defeated Fred Miller in Bligh.	
53:30	<i>After this election Wran is jeered at NSW Civil Liberties for lack of progress on homosexual law reform.</i> Wran is in power for another 18 months – 2 years. Then Unsworth came to power and defeated in 1988. Paul was elected to the Upper House. He was the first openly gay parliamentarian. <i>Tony Doyle was elected at the same time.</i> January 1988.	Barry Unsworth; NSW Upper House; Tony Doyle;
55:30	AIDS emerged with a bang. A San Franciscan disease. The difference with the US was that in Australia there was a bi-partisan approach. Peter Baume was Opposition Health Spokesman, and Neal Blewitt in Government Federally. In the 1980s there was decimation, people were distraught and [gay men] were asking 'how long will I be around for'?	AIDS; Peter Baume; Neal Blewitt;
58:40	A large amount of energy went into AIDS organisations. Paul was involved with helping friends. At Prince Henry Hospital was where friends were hospitalised. They were younger and lost fewer people.	Prince Henry Hospital;
1:00:00	AIDS impact on the gay social scene. He lived at Parramatta and Blacktown some distance from the clubs.	AIDS; gay social scene;
1:00:50	Peter Anderson was the NSW Health Minister and he was reasonable. The Federal leadership made it easier for State Governments to fall into line, with policy and taking the lead and thus the sting and calming fear. So reactionary forces in State Governments/the media were easier dealt with. The 2GBs of this world were not so reactionary. Bryan White did an intelligent afternoon show. He doesn't believe the desire for fear and loathing was strong.	Peter Anderson; AIDS Policy; Bryan White;
1:04:00	<i>Did you get involved with AIDS politically?</i> Not really. It was a part of an agenda and was important for a number of reasons. St Vincents took a total care perspective. That taught us policy lessons about total care from a health perspective and a Health budget and years later this was at the forefront of health care.	St Vincents; Total Care;
1:06:00	<i>Was he factional leader for the Left?</i> No. But he had a point of view and didn't mind expressing that.	
1:06:48	1988 election brought a lot of changes to the upper house. Paul describes the Upper House as a stuffy old men's club. Although there were women there like Virginia Chadwick [Liberal] and Delcia Kyte [Labor]. He describes himself as a bit different, bringing new ideas and articulating them. Example: Drug law reform. Richard Jones [Australian Democrat] came a bit later, again a breath of fresh air. Assumption you went there to retire, and Paul didn't have that attitude. There were others who shared Paul's approach. There was a range of new people at the 1988 election. Stephen Mutch (Liberal) for example.	NSW Upper House; Virginia Chadwick; Delcia Kyte; Richard Jones; Stephen Mutch;
1:08:48	<i>Issues pushed in this period.</i> To speak about what he believed in and not be afraid to speak and take people on. Fred Nile? Yes, but by "eyeballing" Fred – no one had done that before. A movie [Last Temptation of Christ?] Fred was railing against. He dealt with him by interjections. "Change the channel Fred".	Fred Nile;
1:10:00	Fred Nile was the politician and Elaine Nile was the driver of the [FOL] policy. He took part in Cleansing the Cross and praying against the Mardi Gras in Liverpool Street were picture opportunities for him.	Fred Nile; Elaine Nile; Cleansing the Cross; Mardi Gras;
1:13:00	Others. A National Party member in the Upper House, Judy Jakens. And the agrarian socialist gentlemen, Sir Adrian Solomons (National), ... Moffatt Chair of the National Party were congenial and polite.	Judy Jakens; Sir Adrian Solomons;
1:14:30	Attitudes to Paul as a homosexual. Some would laugh about it, some ignore it. Some of the worse perhaps were closets.	Homosexuality;

1:15:10	Homosexual law reform in the 1990s. Saw it as important, “moving things on”. Part of a process to trying to prod and poke. Paul was in contact with the Gay Rights Lobby at events. “Trying to get all those chords to come together.” He played a role “in being true to those you wish to represent.”	Homosexual Law Reform; Gay Rights Lobby;
1:16:30	Was there an issue you were successful in. <i>Paul shied away from the question</i> saying everybody made a contribution and in politics it is very rare thing to rule a line and say you have achieved. All you can do is bounce the balls in and keep them bouncing and try to get people [in?] along the way. That was his role.	
1:17:30	<i>Was there an achievement you were involved with?</i> “We moved the whole debate along in that period substantially ... On our [homosexuals] access to government.” He uses the examples of AIDS politics, Mardi Gras politics, Law Refrom politics. It was a period when [homosexuals] weren’t seen as people with two heads. “You may want to call it mainstreaming.” Getting people in government to recognise a range of discrimination and opportunity.	Homosexual lobbying;
1:18:40	<i>Compare this to the early days of CAMP knocking on Wran’s door. Was the gay community just being more professional?</i> Things evolve and in this period both sides felt comfortable, and bureaucrats and police had to come to terms with the new situation. The Attorney General was funding things. <i>A group of gay professionals running Mardi Gras and the Gay Rights Lobby, and were not particularly working class. Mardi Gras Economic Impact Statement in 1998. 1998?</i> Paul thinks it was earlier.	Professionalism; Attorney General;
1:22:05	<i>The people Paul was talking to were movement people or influential gays outside the movement?</i> He would have talked to a range of people.	
1:23:00	<i>Susan Harben’s candidature against Clover?</i> He had always encouraged political activism. Susan running against Clover wasn’t his first idea and would have preferred her to move somewhere and work for a seat. On her abilities not on her identity. Whether (her candidature) was smart is another issue. But it made the party take notice a bit more [of gay issues]. And Susan had ability and commitment.	Susan Harben; Clover Moore;
1:25:30	<i>With the Upper House until 1996.</i> Paul resigned. He got sick with a HIV related illness. And could no longer be an activist member. He had expected to die.	HIV;
1:26:35	Since then, he has been involved in politics. He worked as a staffer and the most rewarding and enjoyable was with Frank Sartor. Worked with him about what a Sartor leadership would have been. They had no hope but came within two votes. Working on his staff when Environment Minister was a really great time. Energy efficient buildings, allow for loans to retro-fit buildings, coastal protection. Frank had brains and work ethic and grace to admit he was wrong. A highlight when the Government was poorly performing. And it was a struggle to achieve things – “it was hairy armpit stuff”. [Michael] Costa had gone, but [Joseph] Tripodi and Eric [Roozendaal] were appalling. Eric cut Environment by 30% in the Budget and he didn’t have an understanding of the issues. Waste and dust from coal mining and off coal trains was another issue that was raised by Frank.	Frank Sartor; Enironment Minister; Michael Costa; Joseph Tripodi; Eric Roozendaal;
1:33:00	After working for Frank Sartor, Paul has been in hospital with cancer at St Vincents with radiation therapy, and here to tell the story.	St Vincents Hospital; Cancer;
1:34:10	At the time of the interview, he tries to make a contribution and nudge things along and he was still doing this.	