

Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Renny Roccon, aka The Fabulous Wonder Mama

Interviewer: Helen Caple

Date: 12 March 2024

Location of interview: Abbotsford, Bigi Bigi Wangal Lands

Reason for interview: Drag Queens Project

Restrictions: None



Time	Summary	Keywords
00055	Birth name Renato, born 1971 at Balmain Hospital, Sydney	
00110	Grew up in an Italian family in Haberfield, parents migrated from southern and northern Italy. 2 older sisters. Good childhood. Lived in own little world: loved superheroes, Barbie dolls, dressing up in various costumes – doing drag before he even knew what it was.	Early childhood Family life
00200	Dad was a concreter, mum worked in a factory sewing police uniforms; left that and started own dress-making business, manufacturing for big companies.	
00255	His superheroes growing up: Loved Wonder Woman – favourite! (the inspiration for the Fabulous Wonder Mama) Watched Linda Carter in the TV series. Also liked musicals, Xanadu. Doing lip syncing at school for shows.	Superheroes Wonder Woman
00350	Went to Catholic primary school, St Joan of Arc in Haberfield. They were good years. A little bit of bullying because he loved dolls and Wonder Woman – supposedly for 'girls'. High school was Christian Brothers in Lewisham. Hated it. All boys school. Not many good subject options in the 1980s. Did the school rock eisteddfods. Not even Art. Not encouraged. Renny loved comic book art, but teacher hated it. Any time he drew a superhero, teacher would call it Barbarella. So even shunned from doing art.	School life
00545	Had neighbourhood friends, boy next door also creative (still good friends today), used to create comic books together, play games, superheroes. Loved colouring books and Barbie dolls.	Friendships
00635	Left school in 1989, aged 17/18. Went to graphic design school (1-yr course).	Graphic design school
00700	Had always known he was different but took a while to come out. Meeting so many creative people at design school, started to realise he was gay.	
00730	One of the lucky ones to get work in the field soon after graduating – very commercial based work.	
00800	Coming out: Grew up in an Italian family. Not very traditional or religious, but knew parents were homophobic. Too scared to come out to family but did come out to friends and work colleagues at age 21, once working in graphic design.	Coming out

00915	First job was for in-house art department for Best & Less. Nickers and Bras, creating the catalogue – loved it. There for 6-7 years. Great people, a lot of fun. Out later on at work.	Design work Best & Less
01020	Always knew that didn't like girls, but did like boys, just never thought anything of it.	
01045	Often retreated back into self, avoided conflict.	
01115	Study at graphic design school had all been by hand – no computers back then. Best & Less didn't have computers either. Went to other publishing companies. Had free reign on creative design. At a medical book publishing place, did publicity flyers and encouraged to be creative in his designs. Went to print broker next. Then to a company that did posters for RSL clubs – Loved that. Could do the campest, tackiest posters.	Design work
01330	Spent about 22 years in the industry. Left the industry after dramas with co-workers over design aesthetics.	
01420	Had gay friends, but not hugely social. Mostly in own world, avoided groups growing up. Too shy to go to bars/cubs. Met a couple of friends through the personal ads in Sydney Star Observer. Still living at home but started to get awkward with parents as these new friends would be calling him at home. Would go out to Oxford Street: Midnight Shift, Exchange Hotel.	Friendships Social life Oxford Street Midnight Shift Exchange Hotel
01610	Fashion was pretty bad. Had a weight issue when left school. Started to look at the gay guys out on the town, so hit the gym. Parents were horrified at sudden weight loss. Wouldn't eat certain foods at home (pasta/cakes). Would spend 2-hrs a day in the gym, did aerobics classes, weights. Would wear corduroy shirts. Had a bit of a mullet at high school. Started to lose hair at end of Yr12. Now can't imagine having any hair (except the wigs that Wonder Mama wears).	
01815	Relationships were short-lived. One of the first was with a drag queen – before he started drag himself. Went to a dinner with their drag queen friends who were so out there, confident, outspoken and Renny was just terrified, so left the party. Boyfriend was very angry that he couldn't handle the scene. They broke up.	Boyfriend
02020	Had given up on the personal ads by this time – never knew who you were going to meet.	
02040	Lived in Potts Point then, but Mum got sick, so moved back home to help look after her. At this time decided to leave design work and moved into community support work. Doing that to more than 12 yrs now. Involves home care, respite work, transporting patients. Dementia clients, people coming out of hospital. Fits well with Wonder Mama work.	Community support work
02310	Drag career starts from early childhood! Went to Book Week event at primary school as Rapunzel (8-9 yrs old). Mum made him the costume and wig of fabric, plaited. Always trying to dress	Drag experiences

	up as Wonder Woman as a kid. Remembers buying a brown curly wig and doing drag for family – did a Chakka Khan number at uncle’s place (about 14 yrs old). Parents didn’t know what they were in for!	
02450	First serious drag moment came in 2015 when did ‘Wonder Woman out on the Town’ for Mardi Gras Parade. Over the top costume – really bad, describes it as ‘horrific’.	Wonder Woman out on the Town Mardi Gras
02535	First participated in Mardi Gras in 1998 when did a giant fairy bread costume; then did a giant pansy.	Mardi Gras parade
02605	In 2016 joined someone else’s group for the Parade. Darleene did a Wonder Woman Breast Cancer float. Everyone did their own costumes. Developed Wonder Mama over several years following on from these experiences. Wrote two story books about Wonder Mama as a little COVID project.	Darleene Wonder Woman Breast Cancer float Mardi Gras
02645	Often went to Newtown Hotel, to the Imperial Hotel, to watch drag queens. Had no idea to do it himself, maybe too scared because of family. Didn’t conceive of Wonder Mama as strictly ‘drag’. Because she is a superhero, saw her more as ‘Cosplay’. Only more recently started to do different variations of her, so becoming more ‘drag’ when doing live singing or doing drawing classes. Never involved in the drag scene besides being a spectator.	Newtown Hotel Imperial Hotel
02800	Remembers the Albury Hotel. Drag Queens: Portia, Mogodonna, Fahrenheit. Still never thought he would be doing drag – had fear of doing it.	Drag queens
02855	Never really came out to parents. Mum found out by snooping around his room. Called him at work (Best & Less) and said not feeling well, can you come home. Knew something was going on (as she would normally call his sisters). Found his copies of Star Observer. So he came out to her. Had a confrontation. She was very angry. Not allowed to tell his dad. Still scared, still confused. He’d just turned 21. Regrets not telling his dad, as thinking that he would’ve been ok with it.	
03140	Now has a very supportive relationship with sisters. One of them was there for his first performance as Wonder Mama at the Shakespeare Hotel, Surry Hills.	
03225	Wonder Mama’s first appearance was as ‘Wonder Woman out on the Town’, just before marriage equality, so tag line was Wonder Mama is out looking for a husband. Her nephew walked with her as a single entry. Started to get traction from that year onwards. Some TV coverage. But pretty horrible costumes – big saggy boobs. So decided to make her a different version of Wonder Woman – so changed her name. Renny was still big at that time and costume lady told	Mardi Gras

	her that she was like an Italian mama, so that was where the name came from.	
03430	Wonder Mama's superhero qualities: fights for equality, justice, fairness, and she's a little bit woke. Not many super powers – she uses those of others!	Super powers
03530	Mardi Gras – amazing experience. Much better to be marching. Going through the creative process, making things. Lucky to have space at home to prepare floats. One year (way back) did a tribute to Wonder Woman – 50 th anniversary float – giant comic book and a pole dancing wonder woman, used the MG Workshop for that float.	Mardi Gras
03735	2024 was the first time not to have Wonder Mama in the title of the float. Wanted to make sure it was 'Drag Storytime is not a Crime'. In the past it has usually been pretty light, a lot of fun. But this year, really wanted to get across how important Drag Storytime is.	Mardi Gras Drag Storytime
03840	Has participated in drag storytimes since 2018 – done a few with Oxtravaganza, with Rainbow Families. Pre-covid, organized own in conjunction with the local RSL Club through community grants. Read stories, activities, mask making. Great times. Dramas developed in the US, moved to Australia, so we now get some local councils that won't host drag storytimes. Horrible times, so was inspired last year to do this theme for 2024 – very quick to get application in for 2024 Mardi Gras.	Drag storytimes Oxtravaganza Rainbow Families RSL Clubs Controversy
04100	Drag Storytime is not a Crime float at 2024 Mardi Gras: Came about as pushback against the haters suggesting that they are groomers. Also responding to controversy with Courtney Act reading a book on TV when there weren't any kids even present. She got slaughtered for it. Concept was an open storybook with the slogan on it and drag queens holding up placards with messages of acceptance, kindness, diversity. Simple concepts – no vehicles. Friends helped build the float.	2024 Mardi Gras float idea
04250	Own negative experiences: posters advertising Wonder Mama events were being ripped down. Terrified that would get protests. An event in Darwin had online complaints. But nothing happened and had an amazing time with the kids and families there.	Drag storytime experiences
04500	Remembers a storytime at a daycare centre in Leichhardt. Kids all dressed in rainbow colours, around the time of Mardi Gras. Leichhardt Council had posted about the event on their Instagram. Nothing happened on the day of the event. Didn't realise until a few weeks/months later that really abusive comments had been directed at Wonder Mama via Instagram. Very upsetting. Decided to report the comments.	

04655	<p>As an author/illustrator: has self-published three books. Two are about Wonder Mama as a spin off from Wonder Woman. Created her own little universe but is also fangirling Wonder Woman. Old school illustrator on paper – slower, so hasn't published enough there.</p> <p>Then published 'It's OK to be me'. A story about own childhood experiences, playing with dolls. Nothing about gender in there. Just about a kid who doesn't fit into the 'boy' mould. It does really well with early childhood educators.</p> <p>Did get push back from a Mummy Blogger about this book but able to block that.</p> <p>The second Wonder Mama book is a celebration of Mardi Gras.</p>	Publishing
05030	<p>Really hard to get a publisher's backing. So self-published and publicized himself. Better Read than Dead in Newtown and the Darlinghurst bookshop stock the books.</p>	
05140	<p>Has read 'It's OK to be me' at Oxtravaganza Family Zone. Very well received.</p>	
05255	<p>Wonder Mama's future plans: Continue with Drink and Draw with a Drag Queen. And pushing the live singing and performance and finally realizing childhood dreams.</p>	
05415	<p>Already got the idea for Mardi Gras next year, which will be ten years of Wonder Mama. She will have a message for the whole LGBTIQA+ community and will continue in her fabulousness.</p>	