

Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Ron Smith

Interviewer: John Witte

Date: 19th June 2007

Location of interview: Benledi, Glebe

Reason for interview: Early Mardi Gras

Restrictions: None

Call Number: OH070619RS



Time	Summary	Keywords
0000	Born and raised in Arncliffe. Maternal grandparents were Seventh Day Adventists, so he was raised vegetarian and surrounded by holy sayings. Paternal grandfather was a wharfie and grandmother grew and exported orchids and made elaborate iced cakes for which she won prizes.	Arncliffe Seventh Day Adventists
0137	Mother was a milliner and father was a motor mechanic and in early childhood children were sick and to pay off surgeon's bills, father worked additionally from home and Ron was sent to the doctors at weekends to be a dogsbody. The doctor was head of the Australian Photographer's association and he had 3D cameras. Exposed to amazing art and sculpture.	Australian Photographers' Association
0248	Mother was ill and Ron took over home duties, cooking and cleaning for the family for a couple of years when he was 9 – 11. When she came back, he didn't continue school and his mother showed him millinery techniques, papier mâché. Made sculptures at home. Their neighbour was a woman who ran the Abba Dabba costume studio. She supplied papier mâché for the Waratah Spring Parade in Sydney. She bought the best costumes from the Tivoli when it closed. Learned a lot of techniques from her.	Abba Dabba Costume Studio Waratah Spring Parade Tivoli
0444	Got into High School aged 11. By age 14 he decided to leave school.	
0620	About this time had his first experience with LSD. Decided to leave home and went to where the bohemians lived – Paddington. He got a room in Gosbel Street Paddington. His mother was upset with him leaving home, but father did not object too much.	LSD Paddington Gosbel Street
0722	Applied for and got a scholarship to go to Art School. His spending money was \$7 and rent was \$10 a week, so he modeled for art students at night and also used to have a few sugar daddies. Talks about one he met through art school who lived at Bellevue Hill. Watching moon landing on his TV. It went on for a few years.	Bellevue Hill
0918	Went to St George Tech for the first 2 years of Art School. Studied plant drawing, lettering but loved sculpture. A teacher was Bert Flugelmann. Bert understood overseas art trends. The students took drugs. They went to anarchist meetings, Bob Gould's 3 rd World bookshop in Goulburn Street. They would	St George Tech Burt Flugelmann Bob Gould 3 rd World Bookshop

	watch movies there and have political discussions about the revolution.	
1050	Also visited East Sydney Tech and met with the arts students union and then became the President of the St George branch of the arts students union, putting on parties and events.	East Sydney Tech Arts Students Union
1114	The best description of the aesthetic his circle of friends was “the pink painters” They were interested in avante garde art in UK and New York and locally in Sydney. Pop art was happening, locally there was Ken Reinhardt showing at the Bonython Gallery. With Flugelmann put on a happening/environment at Oyster Bay, called the “Black Box”. A psychaedelic environment.	Ken Reinhardt Bonython Gallery Oyster Bay Black Box
1337	Met up at Art School with people doing theatre. At East Sydney he worked on “Alexander Nevski’s homecoming” with David Humphries who was head of the arts student’s union and who later was important in community arts. Also worked on Christo’s wrap up of Little Bay. Held meetings for that upstairs at the Oxford Pub, which was then the art students pub. They’d watch movies on Friday. Saturday nights e.g. Battleship Potemkin. The film club was run by Kim Hilder who he later worked for making models and special effects for movies.	David Humphries Christo Little Bay Kim Hilder
1506	He spent 2 years at St George and 2 years at East Sydney. By the second year at East Sydney, the arts school institution there became passé when compared to what was happening outside – like wrapping of Little Bay. A week before finishing the diploma he took off.	St George Tech East Sydney Tech Little Bay
1606	With a friend, who found the official seal used on the diplomas and so he used that on 100s of copies of diplomas and stood at the gates of the school and handed them out and pasted the urinal with them. Worked on major works during the night.	
1705	He created a stuffed dummy self-portrait in an ocean of shredded naval secrets stolen from Garden Island and threw in a real gun and this was his major work. Condemned as a fire hazard and removed from the exhibition.	Garden Island
1855	Then worked as a psych nurse. High paying job. Became involved with patients in art projects. He put on a show of their work at East Sydney of ceramic sculptures and works on paper. He feels that it was good for the patient’s identity to be recognised. Took them out of the day-to-day boredom and horror of the hospital.	
2112	They had occupational therapy which was hum drum stuff. But there were people with talent and it was a factory of “outsider art”.	
2145	Moved into a series of houses. One at the end of art school with other art students at 196 Liverpool Street, Darlinghurst. At that time was the ‘Save the Gurinji’ Aboriginal Land Rights, demos	Liverpool Street Gurinji Aboriginal Land

	were starting to happen which were organised from that house.	Rights
2230	Others in the house, Rosalie Cawthorne, Maria Hishon, Adam Plater, Ros Dent, Marie Cottier. Next door was another group of students who put on happenings at Watters Gallery they became a group called Savat. Bill Trangitello, Mort Fist, the William Brothers and downstairs in that house were a neo nazi group. Co-existed there.	Rosalie Cawthorne, Maria Hishon, Adam Plater, Ros Dent, Marie Cottier, Watters Gallery Savat Bill Trangitello Mort Fist William Brothers
2425	Remembers his house being mentioned in the Telegraph. That they were a group of 'violent hippies'.	
2455	Went to demos – Land Rights and Moratoriums in possibly 1969. Ron was always terrified about being arrested.	Land Rights Moratorium
2538	About that time met gay couples moving into Darlinghurst. Most of the people he knew then identified as "Straight", although men wore nail polish and had long hair and once they moved all their beds together and slept in one room, but that didn't last too long.	Darlinghurst
2705	Gay scene? There were men walking hand in hand and effeminate hippies, but he had little connection with the gay commercial scene because he had no money. And didn't do beats then and thought of himself as an outsider and considered himself a witness to scenes.	
2950	When he was homeless and moved into Centennial Park under the hedges near the lake. He never thought of himself as "unfortunate". No money, walking around as a 'witness' to life.	
3055	Liverpool Street house was at the end of art school. Rosalie, Maria and Adam Plater had met at St George. Adam's father had an art supply shop in the city.	Liverpool Street
3200	Thinks it was 1969, because it was the first time a friend had a baby – Jenny Hooper - was in 1970.	Jenny Hooper
3230	After Art School (1970) went into nursing, mainly in geriatrics. Moved into a house in Riley Street which was anarchic. No lock on the front door. There were 8 people and 2 goats living in the house and 6 ducks. A lot of LSD was taken, virtually every night. One man made strobe lights and special effect lighting for LSD Fogg, who were next door.	Riley Street LSD LSD Fogg
3400	Ron rented the LSD Fogg shop front and opened a shop called "Smith's." He never opened the shop and only arranged things to be seen from the street, made by friends.	LSD Fogg
3445	About then friends and Tony Goodwin set up another shop in Flinders Street near Taylor Square which became the Roxy. People could sell anything they made, and it had a public access workshop where you could make anything. It became a landmark	Tony Goodwin Flinders Street Roxy Taylor Square

	in Taylor Square.	
3535	In the lease nobody was to live there. But there were 6 people lived there in holes under the floor and the stairs. None were on the dole. \$80 a week rent was paid for the place by 20% commission on goods sold in the shop – plaster food and plaster clothing.	
3625	Ron explained how to make plaster clothing and plaster food, and plasticine peas. Not much was sold.	
3811	There was an enormous walk in safe which people used for LSD trips and be locked in there.	LSD
3845	The Roxy people worked on the Ourimbah Festival in the early 70s. They made a large volcano, a smoke machine and strobe lights, papier mâché boulders and threw them out from the top of a hill to the crowd below. Johnny Allen organised these and he was a queen. He had a place in Surry Hills called the Arts Factory which was more hippy than the Roxy. Hippy was tie dyed. Roxy would copy a Michaelangelo on the back of a shirt.	Roxy Ourimbah Festival Johnny Allen Surry Hills Arts Factory
4022	They would go to op shops and buy lots of clothes very cheaply.	
4106	They would copy comic strips and for a while they had a giant epidiascope which projected images of objects. It was used to project images on to clouds and nearby buildings in Taylor Square.	Epidiascope
4137	Ron made a giant ice cream for the awning a tribute to milk bars in Victoria. It was heavily varnished.	
4230	Makes distinction between the pop art of the Roxy and the hippy aesthetic. The Yellow House was contemporary with the Roxy and Martin Sharpe asked them to get involved in project called “the whole world’s a movie”. The Yellow House was going to be collection of movie sets.	Yellow House Martin Sharpe
4333	The Roxy was a patriarchy under the thumb of Tony Goodwin. Toby didn’t like Martin Sharpe so they didn’t get involved.	Roxy Tony Goodwin Martin Sharpe
4350	They weren’t allowed to have their own money. Money was pooled to pay for food and the rent. The Roxy became a theatre restaurant.	Roxy
4450	Before this Richard Neville came in one day and set up a photographic session at the Roxy with a drag group called ‘Sylvia and the Synthetics’, wearing Alexandra Rhodes outfits.	Richard Neville Roxy Sylvia and the Synthetics Alexandra Rhodes
4650	The Synthetics did a couple of shows. He remembers the second one based on circuses. A Trapeze set up upstairs. Queens sucking men off on the trapeze. Andrew Sharpe, Martin’s brother, doing a striptease to Randy Neuman’s “Leave your hat on”. At that performance Kandy (Johnson) came. Either before or after that performance, Kandy had commissioned them	Synthetics Andrew Sharpe Randy Neuman Kandy Johnson Kristal Pistol

	to make a giant conch shell for “the Kristal Pistol”. Kandy had done a show called “Heaven, Hell and High Water” and for the high water sequence, the conch shell rolled on stage and revolved and Kandy stepped out as King Neptune and then there were drags being mermaids, and a performer who was stripped naked by the queens and stabbed by King Neptune with a trident. Ron remembers drag queens and real sailors at the bar at Krystal Pistol.	
4945	The Purple Onion site was vacant and so Kandy took “us” out there and he was going to have one more go at re-opening the Onion, with the Synthetics as the starring act. “We repainted the interior of the Onion made it into Cloudland, so it was sky blue with puffy clouds and it was a great opportunity Kandy had all the old costumes stored there and it was great going through the amazing costume collection”. The Synthetics opened and on the opening night the police burst in and raided the joint, they were thrown in the street and it was closed for all time. It was an unlicensed venue. Ron describes the Onion.	Purple Onion Kandy Johnson Synthetics Cloudland
5215	Once the Restaurant began at the Roxy, he worked on the refurbishment, installed the kitchen. The ice cream cone on the awning was a bone of contention with the council who wanted it removed off the awning. The Council removed the awning off the building. Ron relates more stories about the Roxy – window smashing episode, building the raised plinths and concrete floor, a brick wall.	Roxy Council
5430	He went off after this to Elands.	Elands
5525	The Cellar was “anarchist headquarters” on the corner of Glenmore Road and Oxford Street. Run by Bill Dwyer, who used to wear Sgt Pepper’s clothing and speak at the Domain on Sundays encouraging people to anarchy. He installed a cage in the cellar. He sold homemade acid made by Gladney Oakley. With the proceeds of the sales he set up commune at Elands.	The Cellar Glenmore Road and Oxford Street Bill Dwyer Domain Gladney Oakley Elands
5658	Jenny Hooper and friends from Art School moved to the commune. After a couple of months, they rented another farmhouse away from the commune. Ron went up there to “Rosewood”. It was near Glen Warren and Elands is 40 miles northwest of Taree. Ron fell in love with the father of Jenny’s child.	Jenny Hooper Rosewood Glen Warren Elands Taree
5855	Ron came back to Sydney and then returned to Elands and moved into a milking hut (harvesting corkwood) and Jenny and Richard were living in a teepee. Did a gherkin crop. Jenny and her partner Richard bought the property and then split up. Then Richard and he sort of became an item and raised his 2 y old daughter and lived together for 2 years. Then went to Tea Gardens and Richard left leaving Ron and his daughter, Una. He	Jenny Hooper Richard Tea Gardens Una

	put her in school.	
10258	He met a couple of queens who worked at Tillermans and he got a job there. It was run by John Amery. Then Rick turned up one day and took Una and moved into a squat in Glebe.	Tillermans John Amery Rick Una Glebe
10355	Ron then moved to be with them to another squat in Glebe. The squats were at the Bakery which had been squatted by people from the Roxy.	Glebe Bakery Roxy
TAPE 2		
0000	The squat was in Mitchell Street, Glebe and Ron lived upstairs for 6 months. He lived in 12 Hereford Street, another squat in around 1975. The squats were owned by the Catholic Church. One that he lived in had been boarded up and burned out and Ron made it livable by adding formwork from building sites and sky blue Thai silk and made false ceilings from the silk.	Mitchell Street Hereford Street Catholic Church
0150	Had a couple of affairs there. Smoked a lot of hashish.	Hashish
0320	By the late 70s he must have had a job. Rosalie (from Art School) had moved to a house in Steele Street and lived with Mark Fletcher and a couple of queens called Murray, one who opened a restaurant in Taylor Square called Murrays. Nearby lived, Rosalie's sister Linda who attended demonstrations. Rosalie went off to London in 1978.	Rosalie Cawthorne Steele Street Mark Fletcher Murray Taylor Square Linda Cawthorne London
0702	This was 1978. He remembers demos in the past – he attended the demo outside the ABC (1972) the chant was “homosexuals of the ABC come out and windows opened in the building and people actually came out”. Remembers a cold night event, perhaps the Mardi Gras. Linda and Mark told him and remembers “fantastic, at last an event that wasn't just a mob of people shouting, we were going to celebrate something and dress up and it would be fun”. He didn't costume up.	ABC Linda Mark
0855	Remembers “very few people in costume, the people who were in costume I don't remember there were fairly dodgy costumes like clowns or something or might have been some lame attempt at drag but I don't remember any kind of real fabulousness and I remember an old like a fruit shop truck with some sort of sound system on the back of it, might have been a banner strapped on it and there was a person with a loud hailer was the driver or the passenger shouting stuff and then vaguely I remember something at the cross a kerfuffle at the cross that I guess was that night the brawl with the police on that night, but it is really vague. But what I do remember is the next morning I guess, being outside the Darlinghurst police station, being part of quite a big mob of a few hundred people shouting let them go to the	Mardi Gras Darlinghurst Police Station

	people who had been arrested.”	
1040	He says he was a “demonstration coward” and he was a safe distance from the doors of the police station.	
1115	In February 1979 he went to London for 2 years and came back for part of a year and then went back again. He was in Italy for the Falkland’s War, April ’82.	London Italy Falkland’s War
1210	He thinks he went to ’82 parade with Mark Fletcher and Linda. He came back the next year 1983 and went to the Mardi Gras workshop underneath the Sydney Dance Company which was a squat in Bourke Street.	Mark Fletcher Linda Cawthorne Sydney Dance Co Bourke Street
1395	Tully was there. “He had made a section of stuff for the Sydney Festival Parade including a giant Edna Everage.” He is not sure whether Peter had been using that workshop to produce Edna before Mardi Gras. It was a blonde brick factory or warehouse and the downstairs was a car park. He remembers setting up lights downstairs with a large extension lead to the Dance Company.	Peter Tully Sydney Festival Edna Everage Dance Company
1419	There they made a lead vehicle or a truck for a South American band to go on. There would have been the lead banner saying “Gay Mardi Gras” with a bit of glitter on it. Dorothy’s red slipper, papier mâché on sticks and perhaps costumes and carriages that were based on Sydney landmarks such as the opera house and centrepiece tower. They were bits of styrene on sticks. And lipsticks and make up on sticks. It was Tully’s first parade.	Gay Mardi Gras Dorothy’s Red Slipper Carriages
1550	He remembers meeting Tully. There was a little article in the Star calling for workshop volunteers. He was nervous and remembers Tully being very busy and there being queens and one dyke artist. There was one guy who went off to work with Bill Henson with the Muppets. He made ET and Yoda as a couple, papier mâché heads and Hessian costume. Loved the experience and came back in 84.	Peter Tully Bill Henson ET Yoda
1759	Community Groups came in and used the workshop to put floats together. Peter got a Reverse Garbage Account, and they would get masses of gold cigarette cardboard, gold cigarette line on big rolls – real tat.	Reverse Garbage Account
1835	Peter had been a window dresser and a jewelry student. He had been thrown out of jewelry school because he wanted to make things out of plastic and not diamonds. Peter had great skills putting bits of shit together. “Just the hot glue gun, staples and whatever and just using found objects and stuff. That’s what his own work was based on bits of junk out of kitchens and things you find in back alleyways and that became the materials for the parade, because there was no budget. Peter was already aware of the need for the parade to have height so people could be seen and for things to be a brilliant colour or metallic so that you could see them. And we were also aware from demo	Peter Tully Boomerangs Cronulla Gay Group

	<p>experiences of the failings of the saggy banner and the anonymity of the T shirt and jeans and so we were really going to push ...we were very very pushy on there being as many people in costume as possible and as much décor on floats as possible and as much music as possible so that there could be dancing. The parade wasn't marshaled at all (no barricades) so that people from the crowd were welcome to come in and join the parade as it went along ... so it was very higgledy piggedly but there were ... groups like Boomerangs and Cronulla Gays and people like that. They were established social clubs like that came in pretty early and so probably by the second year by '84 there were prizes for best float and best costume.</p>	
2141	<p>"Peter was very thrifty, extremely thrifty and he would see no point whatsoever in building anything too elaborate ... and he was very conscious of the theatricality of the event. Peter had actually made an opera set ... because he was very aware of how things are seen from afar and I theoretically understood that but I've always been a detail queen and I imagined how much I would delight if I was in the crowd and I came up close to something and it didn't just look like it was detailed but that it actually was and there we differed enormously and obviously he was right".</p>	Peter Tully
2338	<p>"Peter at the same time had come back from NY where he had established himself around the Paradise Garage which was an incredible night club as the official supplier of costumes for the dance scene in New York at that stage. Peter had invented something called "urban tribalwear" and people would wear an outfit once and never again ... he was very aware of lighting and colour and UV and flouro and ... "</p>	Peter Tully New York Paradise Garage Urban Tribalwear
2503	<p>People's costumes were not just for the parade, but would be worn to the party because their costume were the décor – the dance was not decorated. He had a lot of experience in costuming, dancing people and celebrating people and cutting edge queer aesthetic at that point. Ron goes on to explains what he means by queer aesthetic. Peter was living with David McDiarmid and David was working with Linda Jackson and Jenny Kee early Australian fashion house people. David had invented the opal design. They were friends and were aware of a new look in Australia we could have our own fashion here.</p>	Peter Tully David McDiarmid Linda Jackson Jenny Kee
2730	<p>Both Peter and David's references were African tribal stuff. The concept of a tribe, being part of a community, a group. That tribal stuff was easy to make, made out of available materials, was particularly good when you were dancing. "And it exposed a lot of flesh".</p>	
2852	<p>Ron talks about the idea of community. Agrees that there were tribes, but there was a broad umbrella. "We had all marched in</p>	Community Group households

	the Moratorium together and we had all rejected So we all came together on common enemies. A lot of those new age men were misogynist and homophobic even though they may have marched in those marches. You had to be very careful not to encroach too closely." Ron describes a man who transformed from butch to Nellie queen. Group households were working things out. There was no gay space.	Moratorium Homophobia
3210	Ron talks about his impressions of Gay lib and why he didn't join. Not much fun. Exploring an intellectual basis for a new future. But he was aware of the need for change. More interested in anarchy than democracy. "If an artist is let go to express, they'll make something far more fabulous than if they have a committee to answer to"	Gay Liberation
TAPE 3		
0000	Tully and the philosophies behind the parade. Ros Bower was the founder of the Community Arts Board of the Australia Council. She looked at community arts organisations around the world and wrote a report. Community art was about identity and bonding and it was about skill sharing and the process about making the art work was just as important as the final the final product	Peter Tully Ros Bower Community Arts Board Australia Council
TAPE 4		
0000	It was a very different process to what happened in mainstream theatre or galleries.	
0038	Practicing artists would come together with the community to spread the skills and develop friendships.	
0200	They had to workshop community groups so that they understood what was feasible on a parade. Peter loved the Thanksgiving Parade in the US and the Myers parade in Melbourne as a child.	Thanksgiving Parade Myer parade
0253	Ron tells an anecdote about Peter's childhood, when Peter went to a circus and was humiliated by a clown. He had a fiery temper. "He was a very kind and loving and sharing person but don't cross him".	Peter Tully
0514	The Bower philosophy was not shared by the committee. "The Committee had absolutely no knowledge of it or cared for it the committee at that point, we never saw them, except for ... (the co-ordinators). They might come into the workshop to pick up some no parking signs or something like that and they had no connection whatsoever with the parade and most of them went directly to the party and didn't see the parade so they were completely unaware of what the problems were or what was fabulous ... the only stuff they saw were costumes that came into the party and that's it full stop ... Tully would keep the Committee off his back and our backs, and they would ask what was the theme for the parade or what was the theme for the party and he	Ros Bower Mardi Gras Committee Peter Tully Workshop ANZ Bank Bill Whittaker Murray McLachlan Kevin Golding Bruce Pollack

	<p>would say it's a surprise ... they may have been slightly churlish about it but basically they didn't care ... until '86 when I became Artistic Director that I insisted on attending Committee meetings and also insisted that they hold meetings in the workshop which was literally a rats nest ... the terrible conditions which were there, the freezing cold old squat with no windows. Every bit of glass smashed and one toilet for however many hundred people came into the building and no garbage collection. One telephone and the accounting system which was we had an old honey jar on the desk and we'd go to the bank withdraw the allowance from the Kings Cross ANZ bank and stick that in the honey jar and then send volunteers up to the hardware store to buy things and they would take money out of the honey jar and they had to put the receipt for what they bought in the honey jar when they got back, which 9 times out of 10 they would forget ... The administrative support we'd get ... Peter or I would sit at an old laminex table with a phone and answer all of the parade enquiries, everything, you cannot believe how many thousand phone calls a day they'd be so you'd have to simultaneously be gluing something or painting something, carrying on a conversation with a person and talking on the phone and counting money and that was just normal for the job. And the committee had no idea what that was and it was not really until Bill Whittaker came into the workshop in '85 ... and one day he came up to Peter one day and said, 'how do you end up with a parade like this' ... Bill was the clerk of the NSW Parliament and he was well versed in committees and procedure and at that stage there was scandalous financial irregularities, in Bill's own words being carried on by the Committee. So Bill organised with Peter and others a coup to sack the I think '86, Committee election (1985)... everyone went to that meeting to vote for the non-corrupt committee ... there was Bill and Tully and Kevin Golding (Treasurer), Murray McLachlan". Dot was off because she was identified with the 'naughty ones'. Bruce Pollack was brought on because he was a promotions man.</p>	
1415	<p>Tony Crewes was the first festival co-ordinator and put on the first festival, in '85. Ron describes the first festival. Films, art exhibition, fete day in Green Park, Sports Carnival, Swimming Carnival, Tennis event, and Clover Club had a social event.</p>	<p>Tony Crewes Mardi Gras Festival Clover Club</p>
1540	<p>The new committee were behind the workshop, they were ex workshop volunteers. Gary Whitelaw, a gay artist who did papier mâché heads. "Some of the committee later turned into 'enemy'"</p>	<p>Gary Whitelaw</p>
1709	<p>Ron mentions David Ryan who turned to the Cath Phillips Committee. There was David Martin who did likewise.</p>	<p>David Ryan Cath Phillips David Martin Mardi Gras</p>

		Committee
1727	Robert Lake and David Martin did the original street decorations in 83-84 which were beautiful hand appliqué banners, but impractical. Cheap cotton with brilliant colour but not colourfast. 90% were stolen before the parade because they were so beautiful. The Council co-operated in '84 and put banners up on street poles. Previously the Mardi Gras placed bunting and flags on the awnings.	Robert Lake David Martin Street Decorations
1905	From '83 to '86 almost everything on the parade was recycled. And added to. Same old ruby slippers etc. Live bands were brought in – a Brazilian band and a jazz band and then the floats had their sound systems. '84, '85 Tully got laser beams projected down Oxford Street onto mirror balls. Maybe in 84 the Unicorn put a live white horse in the parade, with a cone strapped to its head. The horse bolted through the crowd when the fireworks went off. Peter then made a no live animals policy. And one of the other pubs put in a large articulated lorry, maybe the Unicorn. It had to swing out to get around Taylor Square, nearly crushing the crowds. It was discovered also that manual vehicles broke down in the parade, if you put your foot on the clutch for 2 – 3 hours the clutch would burn out. “The smell of those parades were a mix of marijuana, clutch plate”.	Brazilian Band Oxford Street Unicorn Hotel Peter Tully
2351	Papier mâché heads were recycled. Grace Jones became Michael Jackson the following year. '85 parade Greg Howard made a giant Divine puppet that was recycled in '87 parade as Imelda Marcos with her shoes.	Grace Jones Michael Jackson Greg Howard Divine Imelda Marcos
2434	The '86 parade was a huge washout. All of the workshop input was returned to the workshop in open trucks that tipped enormous heaps of papier mache slop into a mountain. Ron spent the next 3 months leaving through the mouldering mountain picking out every sequin, diamante out of it. From this experience Ron introduced vacuum forming which were light and waterproof. Imelda Marcos shoes, Astro Boy, the Giant Barbie Doll stilt walking costumes were made this way. Vacuum form is polyurethane sheeting. A solid plug with no undercuts made on a board with lots of little holes drilled on it and that goes into the ABC Gore Hill workshop vacuum fill machine. It is returned to the workshop and then everything is sticky taped together with special tape and everything was painted glittered.	Vacuum forming Imelda Marcos Astro Boy Giant Barbie Doll ABC Gore Hill
2725	Imelda Marcos and her shoes was a successful community project because a team worked on Imelda. The wig, the jewelry were done under Doris Fish's supervision with women like Ana Wojack worked on the fabric and the big lae of frangipani. A variety of people came together to produce it. The Waratah Deaf Association was also involved. People customized each of the	Imelda Marcos Doris Fish Ana Wojack Waratah Deaf Association

	shoes. And “all felt like superstars just being a part of it” The crowd went wild. Imelda was such notorious person, the shoes were a famous story, and the campness of it, everybody knew about and loved the story and loved the thing.	
3011	There was still a lesbian reluctance to be part of the workshop. There were paid artists who worked there. And dykes from community groups would come in, like Katrina Martin working on the Immigration task force, ”but by and large there was a political blackban on ... being part of Mardi Gras in the lesbian community ... which had been over some shit fight that I had missed out on in ... the early parades. The battle between fabulousness and seriousness ... a lot of women really hated drag and found it extremely offensive, misogynist ... the lesbian community probably had more focused social groups than any of the men did ...they all knew one another, they knew who was on with who, who lived where, what everybody’s politics were ... very tightknit ... strict politics. You could be anything to do with money, or you couldn’t be with commercialism and all of that which was fine but in the end the glamour thing really put a lot of women off so if they were in the parade at all, they’d be in a walking group with a t shirt that might be a silk screened t shirt for that event ... very very sensible ... more of a demo than a parade”.	Lesbians Katrina Martin Immigration Task Force
3315	Clover Club marched, but they were in sports outfits and marched, and didn’t come to the workshop.	Clover Club
3328	There was a perceived misogyny in the workshop. “there was obviously misogynist queens used the workshop and the Committee was stacked with misogynists ... (manifested in) queens talking about front bums that sort of shit and they were just nasty people”	Misogyny Committee
3408	Ron sees misogyny as something broader being akin to queer bashing. He remembers an incident when people laughed when they heard that Dennis Lennox was seriously bashed on a beat. “That stupid queen fancy getting bashed on a beat”. “The same horrible nastiness was in their male cliqueness”	Dennis Lennox
3529	There were dykes in the workshop, but generally they were employed as artists, or in and out because it was a political no no. Heather Grey used to park blocks away and sneak in the back way because she was terrified to be seen as part of Mardi Gras.	Heather Grey Lesbians
3654	The financial irregularities were officially a secret. At the ’85 AGM nobody was meant to talk about that. It was feared that the reputation of Mardi Gras would be so sullied by it that the whole event would collapse. Ron describes the financial irregularity. But the whispers went out.	Financial irregularities
3847	Ron says that he missed the earlier discussions about who/what	

	could be on the parade and that was already institution.	
3903	The Mardi Gras Committee was extremely male and top heavy. Cayte Latte was the first on the Committee and she came in in '86-7, then Heather Grey '87-8. Then more women started using the workshop.	Cayte Latte Heather Grey
3946	Ron talks about Heather Grey's involvement. She loved working on stuff. Then she made a giant Martina Navratilova and stuck her on her own vehicle and that opened things up a lot. More women's groups got involved in the parade and more got involved in the workshop.	Heather Grey Martina Navratilova
4120	Speculates on why women got involved and talks about the AIDS scare generated by the press. The grim reaper stuff. Bobby Goldsmith was already dead. AIDS organisations had started up with a lot of dykes involved who had been nurses, home support stuff.	AIDS Bobby Goldsmith AIDS Lesbians
4245	In '85 the workshop came under attack from the media. Bashing on the door. At Harmer and Forbes Street. All the windows had been replaced by chicken wire and timber to keep out the local kids. The downstairs toilet was used as the timber store. Channel 10 came to front door and were refused entry. Then a camera on a crane zoomed on the disused toilet. The Monday after the parade, the Herald reported "AIDS victims watch as parade passes by", a story of AIDS victims on the roof of the Koala Inn Hotel. The article had been fabricated.	Harmer and Forbes Street Channel 10 Sydney Morning Herald Koala Inn Hotel AIDS
4546	Within a year the press became more enlightened.	
4558	There was talk of canceling the 86 parade, he thinks. The fall back was, if the parade couldn't happen in the street, it would happen in the showground ring. People would march in circles.	
4645	He believes the council were holding back a parade permit, because they wanted a cleaning deposit. It would apply to Mardi Gras but not any other street event. He thinks it was \$25,000. There was also a cleaning fee from the Domain Trust who didn't want the parade there again.	Cleaning Fee Domain Trust
4749	The one consistent enemy throughout was Fred Nile and his church. They assembled every year and turned their back on the parade. In 1988, in the throes of being sack, he started work on what was going to be a giant Fred Nile, an ogre, to tower over the crowd and reach out. He made a maquette for it. And then Geoffrey Douglas started work modeling the giant head. Then Ron was sacked. The head went ahead and became legend, carried on a platter by the sisters of perpetual indulgence and giving enormous kudos to Cath Phillips who was behind his sacking.	Fred Nile float Cath Phillips
4920	Tully had left Mardi Gras after thousands of volunteer hours he had put in. He had enough. He was getting more famous as an artist. He had a retrospective at the National Gallery. He needed	Peter Tully National Gallery

	time to prepare for exhibitions.	
5108	As he understands it, Cath Phillips took over when Tully left, October or November. Then the Committee elections were in May. Cath was being prosecuted for obscenity for an artwork and Peter Tully admired her for this.	Cath Phillips Peter Tully
5310	She came on to the Committee and they were working on the lead up to the '88 Sleaze Ball.	Sleaze Ball
5330	In the '88 elections, Richard Wherret and Peter McDonald had come on to the Committee, McDonald as the party co-ordinator. At his first meeting McDonald 'I shall make it my responsibility during my tenure on the committee to close the mardi gras workshop as it is in my opinion a failure'. Ron had to work with him then, on the Mardi Gras party, a winter party 'Cool with Sunny Periods', and then Sleaze Ball. The workshop did commercial work and Brisbane Expo. The Military Tattoo.	Richard Wherret Peter MacDonald Workshop Sleaze Ball Brisbane Expo Military Tattoo
5540	For the Sleaze Ball, instead of the artistic director being responsible for the theme, the committee designed the theme.	Sleaze Ball
5636	At that time Cath came into the workshop with her truck and unloaded a load of metal working tools – a triton metal working bench with a buzz saw on it and angle grinders arc welders – and then set them up at the entrance to the workshop. This was new for the workshop, accustomed to tuile and tinsel.	Cath Phillips
5915	Murray (McLachlan) spoke to Ron and 'it has come to my attention that you have been denying Cath resources', 'What resources? I don't have any resources that she wants ...' Next day: He said he confronted her, but she wouldn't tell what resources he had been denying her. Ron said to her, 'If you're going to cause trouble you shouldn't be here. Go home.' And she walked straight to the telephone and dialed Murray who came to the car park and told Ron he had better go home. An extraordinary meeting was called to sack Ron. He was given a letter which was a combination of a glowing reference and a letter of dismissal. Sacked on the spot.	Murray McLachlan Cath Phillips
10245	Cath went on to become President and got an almost all dyke committee. She sacked the Executive Director and they advertised and she didn't like anyone who applied and she appointed herself as executive director which the committee accepted. She refused to stand down as President so she was her own employer.	Cath Phillips
10346	Ron had by now been re-employed as artist by the new art director in 1990. McDiarmid had quit by then.	David McDairmid
	TAPE 5	
0000	Talked about experiences leading up to his sacking pleading with the Committee for materials or for them not to close the workshop. Towards the lead up to the Sleaze Ball, he began singing like a canary and the artists hated him because he never	Sleaze Ball

	shut up about how fucked it all was. When Ron left, David replaced him.	
0125	David had visions for the workshop, parties and parade. At first the Committee was very supportive and gave him a larger budget.	David McDiarmid
0212	Ron says that Cath did a lot of good stuff for Mardi Gras such as re-politicised it, she brought dykes seriously back into it and kicked Fred Nile's arse politically. She put 1,000s of hours into the organisation. Mardi Gras had a voice beyond being just facilitating machine for the event. She valued the workshop, but didn't follow the community art concept. The Committee employed designers instead.	Cath Phillips Fred Nile
TAPE 6		
0000	Around the period of coming into Rushcutters Bay and a proper rented building. Kevin Golding Treasurer in 87 – 88. Kevin believed that Mardi Gras should employ staff and have proper buildings and facilities. He was supportive of the workshop, but not of amateurs trying to do a professional job. The consequence was that you had professional administration, and then at the workshop level you have management of the workshop and some part time navies to run it. To justify the hire of a building you need to do something else for the building. So supported the idea of a commercial/community use so that other people who put on parties or other events could rent the space. Mardi Gras would manufacture stuff for them and employ gay and lesbian artists who could then work on the Mardi Gras full time when needed.	Rushcutters Bay Kevin Golding
0350	Because of the 3 months lead up to Mardi Gras parade was over Christmas (holidays for suppliers, factories) then you need to begin a couple of months before this to start designing, supplying in June. Then you run into Sleaze Ball.	Sleaze Ball
0439	They wanted to go ahead with payment of staff and rent, but this was at the cost of donating money to the community. And money had to be put aside for a possible huge tax bill.	
0525	Becoming professional, the employees become responsible to the elected committee, but they elected committee didn't have detailed knowledge of the day to day running of the workshop.	
0610	Started off by employing an executive director – but there was already an office manager and an office assistant in the old office above the Bookshop shop. Jim Jenkins was the office mgr and it was his idea that there be an executive director, because of the workload of the officer manager and their assistant. Needed someone to make executive decisions, and recommendations to the Committee.	Executive Director Jim Jenkins
0713	As a result Jim wasn't employed and lost his job and the Committee hired Ralph McAlister from the Festival of	Ralph McAlister Festival of

	Wollongong. Ron describes Ralph as an Executive Director impersonator who had no idea what to do and eventually he was sacked.	Wollongong Exec Director
0902	Ron tells of how he another workshop worker way layed a key to the office filing cabinet and used it to keep tabs on their "special branch" style files.	
0930	Elma Mary McFarlane succeeded Ralph and Ron describes her as another impersonator and an incident where she had told the committee she had negotiated use of the park for fair day, Council had not been contacted and it all was fantasy. She was sacked.	Elma Mary McFarlane
1055	When David McDiarmid was art director, they employed a heterosexual Executive Director who employed a heterosexual man as a workshop artist. Ron spoke to Carmel Niland who advised that Mardi Gras had no obligation to employ heterosexuals.	David McDiarmid Carmel Niland
1230	David quit and others quit. These decisions were made by Cath's Committee.	David McDiarmid Cath Phillips
1300	In 1988 Ron met Malcolm Cole at the pub and invited him to do a parade entry. Ron told Ralph McAlister. The next Star Observer ran with the headline "Blacks to lead parade" which he felt was racist. Malcolm did do a James Cook entry.	Malcolm Cole Ralph McAlister James Cook
1440	Ron talks about parties he went to. He remembers a party with a wrecked helicopter and 2 car wrecks and everyone dancing on concrete around that and perhaps this was the first Sleaze Ball, probably '82.	Sleaze Ball 82
1716	In 1985 was the Temple Sleaze Ball that Tully worked on. The first sleaze ball he worked on was '86, party co-ordinator was Jeff Hardy, who did 86 Mardi Gras party, '86 Sleaze and '87 Party. "He was very good at turning shit into a birthday cake". Remembers one where the post parade party came into the Hordern and one after another, the stair cases collapsed, because they were prop stairs hired from the Elizabethan Theatre Trust and not real stairs.	Sleaze Ball 85 Jeff Hardy Hordern Pavilion Elizabethan Trust
1938	'86 Sleaze. Party Committee decision on the theme – English '50s science fiction theme, personified by Dan Dare. The "fall back" talent was Sylvester. Ron did enormous transparent paintings scenes from Dan Dare comics and hung in gaps in the columns at the RHI and a scaffolded corner stage in the columned area of the RHI . Hired alien costumes from the ABC and Tully 'dragified' them with plaits and handbags and he came on stage in costume with Sylvester, spinning Tully handmade mirror balls on sticks. The 'aliens' couldn't see out of the costumes and were spinning the balls around this famous queen on stage, singing 'Take Me To Heaven".	Sleaze Ball 86 Dan Dare Sylvester ABC Peter Tully
2226	The first party with a dyke bar in it. Women wouldn't go but	Lesbian Bar

	queens flocked to it.	
2239	'87 Ron did the poster for which was the Mona Lisa. Unofficial theme was 'A night at the Vatican', made a parade carrying the golden calf, A Sodom and Gomorrah thing, and Heather Grey was the pope who conducted the ceremony. There was a sunburst over the stage, with red papal banners with the gold bee and the crossed keys.	Mona Lisa poster Sodom and Gomorrah Heather Grey Vatican
2355	'88 Russian constructivist theme.	
2405	'88 Winter party was very elaborate. One of the Committee, Panos decided on the theme of the party by opening the newspaper and dropped his finger on the page and it said cool with sunny periods.	Winter party 88 Panos
2500	Ron came up with a tunnel of real ice at the entrance of the Hordern, with a vacuum formed fake ice ceiling over it and transparent hoses created drips. People were too terrified to walk under it. During the night flowers had to open. Had to spend the night on the gantry of the Hordern which was 2 floor boards wide and with a bit of old water pipe to hang on to, 60 feet above the floor, and opened flowers, let it snow. Even though it appeared to be a full house and everyone enjoyed themselves, it was a huge financial flop.	Hordern Pavilion
2645	'89 Queen's Birthday 1 and Birthday 2. Two parties on the same weekend. Ron worked on these in secret. On the budget from the Committee they had to create a huge birthday cake, out of which an organ had to rise, presents.	Queens Birthday Parties 89
2757	'89 Sleaze Ball. It had a décor of fake oil rigs. Cath helped make the fake oil rigs which worked for 10 minutes.	Sleaze Ball 89 Cath Phillips
2841	He had been re-hired in 1990 as Workshop Manager. He made Gumby and recycled Zippy from 1988 as Gumby and Zippy as a couple. Ronald McDonald on Colonel Sander's lap.	Workshop Mgr Gumby, Zippy Ronald McDonald and Col Sanders
3010	AIDS. Heard about it in early 85, late 84. Coming Gay plague in NY. Tully, McDiarmid, Tony Guthrie (make up artist who worked in the workshop) and others had been in NY in the late 70s and early 80s and were all sluts. One by one they died. As the treatment improved, they were living longer.	AIDS Peter Tully David McDiarmid Tony Guthrie New York
3145	Remember going with Doris (Fish) to a Ratts NYE Party perhaps 86, seeing a queen who had Kaposi sarcoma in drag with a plunging back frock, which had black lace to outline the KS. KS as a fashion statement. This had happened during the Black Plague.	Doris Fish RATTS party Kaposi Sarcoma
3240	Tully was tested negative. Couple of months later, while shopping at the markets, with his shopping trolley with blender blades on the hubs, he collapsed. At RPA he was diagnosed with pneumastis pneumonia. There had been a mix up of the original results.	Peter Tully Royal Prince Alfred Pneumastis pneumonia

3400	Doris Fish got sick. Doris died before Peter. He came out to Australia. Had a central line plugged into his chest, but still doing drag and looking fabulous, but thin. Peter and Ron had done an exhibition in Adelaide from found objects called Silly Putty Park with community groups. Ron discovered anodized saucepan lids to be portable, glamorous and cheap and they were also going to make things out of dentures. Most of the creations were destroyed, but the central creation was Peter's Liberace Memorial Fountain which was bought by the National Gallery. Tully brought back anodized lids etc from Adelaide and made totems for a Paris exhibition. It was a critical success and shortly after he got sick and he died and is buried in Paris in Oscar Wilde's cemetery.	Doris Fish Peter Tully Silly Putty Park Anodised lids Liberace Memorial Fountain National Gallery Paris
3813	McDiarmid got sick when Peter was dying and lived for 3 or 4 more years getting progressively ill. Ron nursed him to his death bed.	David McDiarmid
3856	Ron also mentions Brian Ross (costumer maker for the parade). Brian was nursed by other workshop artists. People pitched in and did what they could. 18 people he was close to died before multiple therapy.	Brian Ross
4005	The future of Mardi Gras? It is a secret. Young ones are affluent living basically an apolitical life. People also ran a mile from the mismanagement of Mardi Gras. But the scale of the recent ones is at least the same as years ago. People have picked up the tricks like being seen. More marching groups. "Things never go back, things are never the same, and who wants them to be. I guess it will just evolve". Sees a reaction in the future to post 9/11 repression.	9/11