

Pride History Group Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Lynn Thomas

Interviewer: Scott McKinnon

Date of interview: 1st November 2011

Place of interview: Stanmore

Conditions: None



Tape	Log (summary of what was said)	Proper names
	Born in North Sydney in 1952. Lived in North Sydney until the age of 8. Attended North Sydney Demonstration School. Father was Welsh and had worked in the Navy. He worked in varying job including as travelling salesman, an SP bookie. Mother worked in a factory until her marriage. Two older brothers and a younger sister.	North Sydney North Sydney Demonstration School
3.25	The family was an unhappy one. Mother described staying with her father as revenge. The siblings were not close.	
5.11	Loved her time at North Sydney Demonstration school. An avid reader as a child. Moved from North Sydney to Eastwood while still in primary school. Lived in a Housing Commission area. Attended Kent Road Primary School which was not a good school. One teacher was particularly violent.	Eastwood Kent Road Primary School
8.55	Attended North Ryde High School. A rebel with a bad reputation in school from Kent Road onwards. Smoked from the age of nine. Ambitions of being the world's first female astronaut but was accused of cheating after topping the class in maths.	North Ryde High School
11.02	A voracious reader through school. Reading at a very high level as a child. Librarian at Ryde Library was very supportive and allowed Lynn to read books from the adult section. Librarian at school library also very supportive.	Ryde
12.44	Became involved in the Pentecostal Church as a sixteen year old. Found affection and love in the Church that was absent in the home. Cast demons from her, including lesbianism, although not out at that time.	Pentecostal Church
14.30	Although not aware of herself as a lesbian, did have a sense of herself as different from other girls. This was in part because of reading. Lynn was a very shy child who barely spoke to people.	
18.40	Attended a Pentecostal Church youth group each Wednesday and church on Sunday in Eastwood. Then went to a Church in Greenacre. Interested in religion and belief systems. Had read the bible several times by the age of twelve. Very interested in Egyptian and Nordic mythologies as a child.	Pentecostal Church
21.30	Father was emotionally abusive. A very lonely childhood. The Church and religious belief fulfilled a function. Considered suicide as an eleven year old. There was not a lot of hope and no care and the Church provided that.	
22.50	When the Church prayed to cast lesbianism from her, that was probably the first time Lynn had heard the word lesbian. A boy in the neighbourhood was known as a cross-dresser who would play "mum" in games.	
24.24	Wanted to continue at school so as to study Ancient History but was the only person to sign up to continue to fifth and sixth forms so it was dropped. Discovered science fiction as a teenager, which she loved. Was interested in metal and woodwork at school, but girls were not allowed to study those subjects, so instead was forced to do sewing. After school her mother enrolled her in a secretarial course.	
29.21	Left the secretarial course. Applied for a job as a veterinary assistant but was too small. The only jobs available as a girl were working in factories, nursing, teaching or being a bankteller. All of those, you had to leave when you married. Got a job as a ward assistant in a local hospital as a sixteen year old on the basis that she could then study nursing when she turned seventeen. Was then refused a place	

	at nursing school, so worked in local factories, including making quinine.	
33.59	No interest in boys or girls at this stage. Wanted to have children but never wanted to get married because of the example of her parents unhappy marriage. There was violence in her home and in many of the homes in the neighbourhood.	
37.30	Her mother asked her to leave home just before she turned 19. Stayed with a woman from her church. A friend, who had worked as a prostitute and was pregnant, gave her a copy of The Well of Loneliness and told her to hang on to it and read it one day. Lynn was focussed on keeping people away as a result of childhood abuse, so was not thinking of herself as in any kind of relationship.	Well of Loneliness
40.22	First visited a gay venue four days before her twenty-first birthday. Working again in a hospital as a nurse's aide, and fell in love with a woman she worked with there.	
43.22	Going to Peace Marches from about the age of sixteen. As a twenty year old, read in a newspaper an article about gay dances happening at the Paddington Town Hall. A straight friend told Lynn to get a grip, that she was interested in women. That friend's sister was a lesbian, and they all went to a dance together.	
45.28	Subsequently started going to CAMP in about 1973 or 1974 and continued going to gay dances. Went to the coffee shop at CAMP on Wednesday nights. A very dynamic time going to dances and marches, including Women's Marches.	CAMP 33a Glebe Point Road
48.10	An interest in women's politics before coming out and participating in lesbian activism. Had read works like Female Eunuch and Gloria Steinem's writing. Went to the Mitchell Library and read a book about homosexuality by West. The book said that lesbian have moustaches and criminal tendencies. In order to read the book had to lie and claim to be a university student. As a critical thinker, thought the arguments in the book were rubbish and didn't feel any connection to it.	Female Eunuch Gloria Steinem
50.40	When first attending CAMP, was taking an interest in both the social and political elements. Met a woman named Helen Pasley who had been involved in the movement including helping establish CAMP in Brisbane. Helen had been kicked out of the army for being gay and had been out through the 1950s and 1960s. This was Lynn's first relationship. Helen was from an upperclass background. When they met, Helen was working as a leatherworker and Lynn worked with her. The relationship last five and a half years.	Helen Pasley
60.00	While in CAMP, saw gay and women's politics as integrated and inseparable. There was a strong women's influence in CAMP. Remembers compiling papers for work Robyn Plaister was doing to change anti-discrimination laws. At the time, Fred Nile was active in anti-gay activism.	Robyn Plaister
1.02	Identified as "women's liberation" and the identification as "feminist" came later. Went every year to the Minto Festival. At one Minto festival, the identification was changed from "women's liberation" to "feminism" at a vote. Lynn was opposed to this as she felt "feminism" was too close as a word to "racism" while "liberation" was important.	Minto
1.04	There was a feminist group at CAMP. Lynn was still very shy while at CAMP and uncomfortable having any attention on her. Lynn wrote up the aims for the feminist group.	
1.06	People would spit on you in the street if you were holding hands in public. Just being was politic. Mike Clohesy was fired from job as a teacher for being gay. Lynn attended a demonstration against this and footage of her was shown on the television, which was seen by a neighbour of her parents.	Mike Clohesy
1.08	Lynn came out to her mother in around 1974. Her mother was very supportive. She did not come out to her father, with whom she did not speak, but took girlfriends to visit. A question asked by the movement was whether it should be necessary to come out and say "I'm gay" given that straight people never come out as "straight".	
1.12	Lynn was raped as a nineteen year old by a member of the Church she attended.	

1.14	Interview is paused briefly	
1.14	Dances at the Balmain Town Hall, in Randwick and in North Sydney. Ruby's was her main social place and remembers seeing police collecting envelopes full of money. Several relationships started there. Ruby's was mainly for women, but men would later be allowed in if they were accompanied by a woman. Lynn also went to the Midnight Shift with Helen, even though women were not usually allowed in. Helen had strong connections with the gay male community.	Ruby's Balmain Town Hall Midnight Shift
1.18	Tensions between gay men and lesbians. Philosophical discussions about gender within the movement. Lynn thought that the SCUM Manifesto was terrible. Her desire to have children caused some waves in the groups she socialised with. Women with children sometimes had trouble socialising, especially if the children were male.	SCUM Manifesto
60.21	Lynn was a lesbian separatist for a time. She wanted to buy into Womens' Land because she felt the need for some separate space for women. Public space was all male space.	Lesbian separatism Women's Land
60.22	A lesbian vigilante group kidnapped a man known to be a rapist and left him in the Blue Mountains with no clothes. Men were referred to as "mutants" for a time after the research about X and Y chromosomes was published. This was taking on the modality of the oppressor and using it back.	
60.23	There was a "Malcolm X" side of the movement – more separatist and potentially violent – and a "Martin Luther King" side – more accommodating. Lynn saw herself as somewhere in the middle.	
60.26	Went to the Women's Health Centre in Leichhardt when it first started. She did an assertiveness group there. Lynn was part of a group who established some of the early women's refuges and abortion clinics. These were often run-down houses and Lynn would take part in working bees to clean them up. Elsie was one of the refuges she helped set up and she volunteered there.	Women's Health Centre Leichhardt Elsie Women's Refuge
60.29	Lynn lived in a number of places in Haberfield which, like Leichhardt, had a large lesbian community. She tried to buy a house in Haberfield but as a single woman she could not get finance. Leichhardt was nice as a space where you could see other lesbians on the street. Gay men also.	Haberfield
60.30	There were discussions around using the term "lesbian" as distinct from "homosexual". Lynn was saddened by this because she saw men and women working together. There were men, however, who did not like women. The men had a lot of spaces, like the Midnight Shift, where women were not allowed. The men's culture was also more sexually based, as opposed to the women's culture which was more based on networking.	Midnight Shift
60.32	The dances were opened up to straight men at one stage. This wasn't always successful and remembers one dance at which a straight man threw a beer can at a woman whose girlfriend was refusing to dance with him.	
60.33	There was violence from the police at many demonstrations. Lynn was pushed up against a wall among a crowd by police in a demonstration in Canberra.	
60.34	Lynn attended the 1978 Mardi Gras with Helen and Col Eglinton. She has very little memory of it. She and her friends left to get something to eat before any of the arrests started, because at that stage it was just another march.	Mardi Gras 1978 Col Eglinton
60.35	Lynn was contacted by a solicitor defending a man accused of the Hilton Hotel bombing. She had been working past the Hilton that morning taking part in a women's march. She was told by the solicitor that there were government files containing photographs of her taking part.	
60.36	There was a clash at an anti-abortion march with Christian fundamentalists.	
60.37	Margie McCann stayed with Lynn and Helen during the day when recuperating from a heart attack. Margie offered the name "Mardi Gras" at a meeting as a sarcastic comment but was peeved when it was actually adopted as the name.	Margie McCann

	There was a difference between the social aims of some of the men and the political goals of the women's movement.	
60.39	Calamity Jane was screened at a gay film festival. There was talk that "we should go and enjoy this" and people got dressed up. This was women learning from playfulness of the men.	Calamity Jane Doris Day Gay Film Festival
60.40	Into the 1980s, the dances began to fade away. There was the Sussex Hotel in Sussex Street. Julie McCrossin would perform at pubs and was very funny. Margaret Rodinight was a singer. Judy Small and Robyn Archer were also performing.	Julie McCrossin Judy Small Robyn Archer Margaret
60.43	Lynn tried to join the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) in the 1970s but was told no because they were trying to attract a different sort of membership. This was also class-related, as the women in WEL tended to be more middle class. The lesbian movement and CAMP tended to be a greater mix of classes.	Women's Electoral Lobby
60.45	Lynn did volunteer work with Phone-a-Friend. A friend, Heather, with whom she went to CAMP, had mental health issues and committed suicide.	Phone-a-Friend
60.47	Lynn attended a conference at the Town Hall called "Women on Top". This conference was about women in the work-place. She also attended the first National Homosexual Conference. At a conference in Carslaw at Sydney University. Inspired by a paper given by Col Eglinton about discrimination against women in employment at that conference, Lynn applied to join the Navy, but was turned down.	National Homosexual Conference Women on Top Sydney University Col Eglinton
60.49	Lynn had a boyfriend in her late teens and had a couple of marriage proposals. She was considered "wife material" because she wasn't sleeping with any of the boys.	
60.51	Also went to conferences in Melbourne and in a small town.	
60.52	Interview ended.	