

Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Peter Trebilco

Interviewer: John Witte

Date: 1 February 2010. Peter amended the log on 26/5/10.

Location of interview: Pride History Group Office, "Benledi", 186 Glebe Point Road, Glebe NSW

Reason for interview: Project 40

Restrictions: None



0:20	<p>Peter Trebilco ("PT") was born 15/12/1927 in Hawthorne, Melbourne. He lived on Glenferrie Rd. His father was a providore for Howard Smith's big shipping agent company. For the first 8-9 years of his life, PT's father worked between Melbourne and Sydney, and PT would move every 2 years between those cities. He recalls returning to Sydney in late 1938.</p> <p>They did not return to Melbourne around 1940 due to WWII. PT's father was a Lieutenant Colonel in the reserve army and tried to be placed in the artillery, but his employer claimed he was working in a protected occupation and would not release him. He would have been captured in Singapore in 1941 if he had fought. But his father was unhappy about not being able to serve.</p> <p>PT attended kindergarten in Lindfield and primary school in Melbourne at Trinity Grammar and Knox Grammar, Wahroonga. PT attended "big school" at Warrawee, where he finished in 1946.</p>	<p>Hawthorne, Melbourne, Sydney, Lindfield, WWII, Singapore, Kindergarten, Trinity Grammar, Melbourne, Knox Grammar, Wahroonga, Warrawee</p>
3:19	<p>PT recalls that while they were reasonably well off, there was not always much money. His father would go hunting at Werribee (Melbourne). PT recalls eating lots of rabbits, tripe and onions, "lots of cheap food". There were no supermarkets pre-WWII.</p> <p>Rawlinsons would sell cooking additives door-to-door as everyone cooked at home. PT recalls a Chinese green-grocer who would grow his own vegetables and used a horse-drawn cart to get fruit from the markets.</p>	<p>Great Depression, Werribee, Rawlinsons</p>
5:35	<p>PT recalls Miss Gillespie, his first primary school teacher. PT recalls having several mates, one of which, Slessor, he is still in contact with.</p> <p>At primary school in Melbourne, PT contracted rheumatic fever and was bedridden for three months. At this time, the school closed for about a month due to a polio scare. When he was sufficiently recovered, he would go to 10am matinee movies. When he returned to Sydney, PT had several friends at Knox. He is still very good friends with one person.</p> <p>PT recalls one sexual experience at primary school in Melbourne, with a boy who was much older than him (13 or 14; PT was 8 or 9). PT recalls that he liked it and thought it was fun.</p>	<p>Miss Gillespie, Slessor Rheumatic fever, Polio, Melbourne, Sydney, Knox</p>
8:20	<p>Homosexuality was never mentioned at home at this time. The vocabulary consisted of "quean" and "men like that"; "queer" did not exist. PT's father's idea of sex education was to have PT read Rabelais' collected works and Anatole France's short stories.</p>	<p>Quean, Rabelais, Anatole France, Oscar Wilde</p>

	PT also read Oscar Wilde. PT's father didn't talk about sex education, or most other things. When PT told his mother he was homosexual just before she died, she said "I've thought so for a long time my dear, but the important thing to remember is never hurt anybody and it will be alright", which PT thinks is "very sound advice".	
9:50	At secondary school, PT recalls being infatuated with two boys of his age, but nothing happened with them. Sexual experience came from visiting beats found between Town Hall station and Hornsby. PT recalls having an argument with a Barker College boy at St Leonard's station, where he told the boy that "this is mine! You can find your own!" Years later, they met again as captains of their debating teams, recognised each other and got along "famously thereafter". PT would run into him every couple of years.	Town Hall Station, Hornsby Station, St Leonards Station
11:15	Beats were risky. There was a "Parks and Gardens Squad" who would be two police officers – to provide sufficient evidence to obtain a conviction – who would dress in civilian clothes and try and entrap. The pairing of the police was due to the case of the artist Douglas Annand, who was caught at Chatswood. PT recalls the details of the Annand case. When Annand later told PT about his experience, he said that he was told, while being formally charged at the station, that "a small sum of money [would see that] the matter would be dropped". PT then relates the story of an elderly district court judge (Judge Clegg) who was "micturating" legally at St James Station and arrested by "two enthusiastic young men", who was also offered in the car to the station to drop the matter for a bail amount of \$200. There was always the risk of bashers, but you learned how to identify them.	Police, "Parks and Gardens Squad", Douglas Annand, Chatswood, St James Station, District Court Judge Clegg
16:50	PT finished school and worked as an Assistant Secretary at the Millions Club, a conservative organisation aiming to get one million British immigrants brought to Australia. After four days PT became the acting Secretary after the incumbent Secretary had a heart attack. The Chief Bar Steward "came out" to PT and related a story about being on the HMS Renown on the trip where the Prince of Wales and Lord Mountbatten visited the colonies in 1921. The Secretary recovered and returned. PT was made redundant. PT then worked for a commercial photographer where he learned industrial photography. The photographer was also an SP bookie. PT soon worked as the photographer's penciller as well on Saturdays, where he earned more on that day than his weekly salary. PT was put out of work when the police raided the studio. The following Monday, PT started as a trainee manager at Morely	Millions Club, HMS Renown, Prince of Wales, Lord Mountbatten, Photography, Morely Johnson, Public Service Board, John/Katherine Cummings

	<p>Johnson (furnishing retailers and furniture manufacturers). PT learned various furnishing skills during this time. The owner later sold the business.</p> <p>PT became an Inspector's Clerk for the Public Service Board. In 1953, PT enrolled in undergraduate law at Sydney University, where he met John/Katherine Cummings (KC).</p>	
25:00	<p>PT recalls that KC was "manic" and "I've never met anybody who could do so many things simultaneously at that speed, and who had this incredible circle of friends." KC was friends with Clive James and Nick Bizanes.</p> <p>PT thought that the law was "OK" until he realised that the English common law system was adversarial, so he decided not to take it further and finished in third year and never went back. He earned "top marks" in criminal law.</p> <p>PT was 26 when he first enrolled and could not really afford it. There were lo (? 10) ladies at the law school; all men and "all working for their living".</p>	<p>John/Katherine Cummings, Clive James, Nick Bizanes, Sydney Law School</p>
28:05	<p>After law, PT was transferred from the Public Service Board to the Companies Registrations Board. Worked there from 1961.</p> <p>PT had been in the CMF from 1948, and by 1961 was a Captain in the Artillery. One day, PT received a telephone call from the Official Secretary to the Governor and invited in for an interview. The Governor, Sir Eric Woodward, was looking for a Military Secretary. Sir Eric was not a warm man, perhaps shy. A few weeks passed and PT had not heard anything further. His superior at the Companies Registration Board had said that PT could not be released, so PT resigned. PT then went to work for an investment company, which soon went broke in 1961 "thanks to Harold Holt; the depression we had to have". PT was then unemployed for two years. He eventually found a job with Sterland Bros at Gosford (building supplies) until 1970. He then became a staff consultant/trainer in his own business for three years while living at Blues Point. While doing this PT was offered part time after hours work for the NSW Department of Public Health lecturing on drug education. From this he secured a full time job as an Education Officer, starting on 1 April 1973.</p>	<p>Companies Registration Board, Citizens' Military Force (CMF), Governor of NSW (Sir Eric Woodward), Lady Woodward, Sterlon Brothers, Blues Point, NSW Department of Public Health,</p>
34:00	<p>At this time PT broke up with John Duncan (JD) as JD's mother was ill and had come over from New Zealand and "definitely did not approve of me". Since then PT has had about three 4-5 year relationships, but none as serious as with JD.</p>	<p>John Duncan</p>
35:05	<p>PT recalls the gay scene in Sydney in the 1950s. At the end of the Sportsman Bar at the Hotel Australia on Friday evening was gay. PT soon discovered that there was a "proper dance" run by the Chameleons twice a year. They were proper balls with an orchestra. Dances were held on the top floor of the Starlight Room (old Mark Foys Building, right on corner of Hyde Park).</p>	<p>Sydney, 1950s, Sportsman Bar, Hotel Australia, Chameleons, Starlight Room,</p>

	<p>PT also discovered the Artists' Ball at the Trocadero, although that was not necessarily gay, but could be gay friendly. Other "proper balls" were also held there.</p> <p>PT recalls arriving at a dance and seeing a drag queen arriving with two police officers following. The queen went straight into the men's toilet and the police left. At that time the law provided that it was illegal to be caught wearing female clothes and female underwear.</p> <p>PT does not recall any other bars other than the Sportsman Bar and Hotel Australia in the 1950s, but he was not looking for them at the time as he was in a relationship. They would rarely go out drinking, and kept a small group of gays friends.</p>	Artists' Ball, Trocadero
40:55	<p>PT met his partner JD during Little Theatre. They both belonged to the Shavian Playhouse located at St Barnabus on Broadway. PT recalls doing a play called "St Joan", where he met JD, in 1956. PT later ran into JD at a time when PT was rather depressed at the death of his mother and invited JD for dinner. PT does not recall any gay and lesbian theatre "as such", but he recalled meeting several gay people in the theatre. PT also recalls several famous straight actors/directors (eg, Leo McKern). PT ultimately ran out of time and gave up the theatre in the late 1970s. He returned in 1991 to Little Theatre.</p>	Little Theatre, Shavian Playhouse, St Barnabas, St Joan, Leo McKern
44:55	<p>John Witte asked PT about the location of Diggers Hall as mention in KC's memoirs. PT thinks that Diggers Hall was an RSL, but is not clear. Did not recall it being in Glebe. Recalls escorting KC to various events, which was how he discovered the Seahorse Club. KC would always dress as a woman and PT was honoured that she would ask him to accompany her.</p>	Diggers Hall, Seahorse Club
47:20	<p>PT recalls "transsexual" as only a fairly recent concept and that transvestitism was more common than people realised. PT has many memories of the Purple Onion and the shows, including Beatrice and Kandy. PT recalls that Abe Saffron's shows were more commercial. Drugs were fairly modest; cocaine was it. Oxford Street did not exist before the 1970s, when three clubs appeared. PT liked Enzos at Paddington (wine bar). PT recalls meeting a friend, Bill, in the late 1960s at Chez Ivy's when suddenly two men danced together, which was "very illegal". Police in civilian clothes appeared and inspected the faces of patrons in connection with a murder at Kings Cross. PT and Bill then went onto the Purple Onion where Bill saw colleagues from work.</p>	Purple Onion, Beatrice, Candy, Abe Saffron, Les Girls, Cocaine, Oxford Street, Enzos, Chez Ivy
54:20	<p>PT did not know anyone connected with the startup of CAMP or the ad in the Australian. PT became involved after meeting a man (name forgotten) who told him of "a meeting tomorrow night" in an apartment opposite Milsons Point Station in Alfred Street. PT comments on the success of the "cell" structure of political</p>	CAMP, Alfred Street, ASIO, NSW Special Branch,

	<p>action. He recalls a meeting at a church hall where he by chance uncovered an ASIO operative at the meeting. There were at least three ASIO agents there that night actually surveying proceedings. That prepared the group for the “endless” phone tapping when CAMP set up the telephone service by NSW Special Branch. PT recalls that Inspector Longbottom – who was a “delightful bloke” – had been told to “watch them”. PT thinks that only NSW Special Brach continued to watch, whereas ASIO stopped watching very early on.</p>	<p>Inspector Longbottom</p>
59:00	<p>PT recalls that the meeting at the church hall at East Balmain had “only just” enough room to sit. He “came out” when he put his name and address down on a list indicating his interest in law reform (one of four lists). He met Sue that night and saw Bonn, Peter de Waal and John Ware at this meeting, but was not involved in organising anything. All sorts of ages were there, although not so many young people. The structure and purpose of CAMP and Stonewall was discussed. PT recalls that Stonewall was a kind of catalyst for the formation of a group. PT held some meetings on law reform at his place after the first meeting where he met WEL members and Dorothy (Simons). Lex Watson was very effective at getting MPs on side for reform aided by Ernie Chaples. PT recalls that Ernie rescued 2010. The meetings at PT’s place focussed on reforming NSW law. Once CAMP NSW launched itself officially, law reform meetings at PT’s ceased. In 1973/74 PT recalls the incorporation of CAMP.</p>	<p>Sue, John Ware, Bonn, Peter de Waal, Stonewall, WEL, Dorothy Simons, Lex Watson, Ernie Sharpels, 2010, CAMP</p>
1:07:22	<p>PT recalls dances being held at 393 Darling Street. It was \$2 entry with free “wine and soft drink”. It was next to a fire station and the police were across the road. They had a “very good relationship” with the cops. The people who attended the dances were “ordinary gays and lesbians” who had heard about the dances; “practically none of them” got involved with CAMP. CAMP was political, not social; it did not like the social scene very much because they ran “second rate” services and believed that drugs were around “somewhere”. CAMP related very closely with Cronulla Gay Group and the Pollies. PT reflects on the relationships between CAMP and the social groups, including the Chamelions. PT recalls Ian McLean’s involvement with the Gay City Broadcasters.</p>	<p>393 Darling Street, CAMP, Cronulla, Pollies, Chameleons, Ian McLean, Gay City Broadcasters</p>
1:15:10	<p>PT recalls the “quite serious” break with the Gay Liberationists. PT recalls a public meeting in 1981 where those interested in political agitation left, but those interested in welfare could stay. PT recalls Bonn’s sacking as “shattering”. PT recalls the beginnings of Phone-a-friend. He started as a counsellor in Glebe Point Road. Recalls that some counsellors used the</p>	<p>CAMP, Gay Liberation, Bonn, Phone-a-friend</p>

	service as “Phone-a-fuck”. This was pre-1986; everything they were doing was illegal, which was why Special Services were interested.	
1:20:25	The Homosexual Guidance Service was mainly for people in rural towns consisting of correspondence when long distance calls were expensive. Queries were answered by letter by the counsellors manning Phone-a-friend.	Homosexual Guidance Service
1:22:00	A lot of women were involved in CAMP. They tended to want political action on women’s rights, lesbians rights and the family, which CAMP could not provide. There was a general growth in feminist awareness, although many of them were already aware from the beginning. PT recalls that specific women’s groups were formed to answer their needs. There were no real issues with men answering women’s queries on Phone-a-friend, although some callers would insist on talking to a woman.	Phone-a-friend, Women
1:25:35	CAMP was changed to Gays Counselling Service (GCS) because by that stage they were only providing telephone service. Political activism was “alive and well” in the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby and the Spartacists. In 1983, AIDS had a huge impact. The Health Commission provided funding to provide telephone advice and education. PT reflects on how “regularised” it has become now, the needs it fulfils today, and how the internet has challenged their services today. The numbers calling have fallen off, but there is always at least one call a night from someone who needs to talk to another person. PT recalls providing education to police, jail and nursing staff. Then ACON is formed and the Albion Street service. With the specialisation of ACON, etc, GCS became purely a telephone service.	Gays Counselling Service, Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, Spartacists, AIDS, ACON, Albion Street
1:30:50	“The need for anything like CAMP, thank goodness, no longer exists”. PT reflects on gay marriage; not a battle he is personally interested in. “The one area that requires continual vigilance is the homophobia emerging from all religious groups, except the Quakers and the Buddhists”	CAMP