

# **Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Garry Wotherspoon**

Interviewer: John Witte

Date: 11 October 2011

Location of interview: Oxford St, Darlinghurst

Reason for interview: Academic career and activism

Restrictions: None



Time	Summary	Keywords
	<b>TAPE 1</b>	
00030	Born in 1940. Grew up in Maroubra in different places. Father was a watcher on the coast (during the war). Had chooks in the yard. Until 20s. Mother was a nurse before marriage, then housewife. Father accountant in Comm bank. Older brother was very conservative. Good relationship with younger sister. Liberal voters, mum adored Menzies.	Maroubra Family
00315	Felt he was probably fairly conservative himself until he went to university quite by accident. Left school at 17, joined a bank (safe, reputable job for life). At 19/20 bumped into former school counsellor who advised him to do a commerce degree – so enrolled at UNSW.	Banking job UNSW
00430	In 1960s, bought a car, more independent. Classed himself as bisexual as had sex with both women and men quite freely.	Sex life
00520	Home talk about homosexuality – in books, could lead to blindness. At 14/15, went with dad to Father and Son movement event, but that was about reproduction and diseases. Nothing about homosexuality.	Father and Son movement
00630	Access to sex with both genders – joined Church fellowship mostly had oral sex, masturbation. Had to buy condoms in Bondi - out of the suburb – if having sex with girls.	Church fellowship
	<b>TAPE 2</b>	
00010	UNSW: Economic was compulsory. Did History as a double strand through degree. Postgrad work/PhD through the bank looking at the history of the bank. At Sydney Uni. Offered a tutorship, then lectureship, and once tenured focused squarely on gay history. But had to be careful about being openly gay.	UNSW Sydney Uni
00225	Grades in History were always far better.	
00255	Started at UNSW in 1961 – uni was in early stages of expansion. A Technical university when starting out. Politics: Labor was in a mess, Liberals were little I liberal, so he started the first Liberal Soc at UNSW. Lasted about 8 months until first State Council meeting. Appalled by their conservative views – cuts to ABC etc. By late 1960s was disenchanted with both parties. But new era with Whitlam. The Push were very hetero. The Sussex was a gay pub – so had own crowd there.	UNSW Liberal Society State Council The Sussex

00620	In 1969, while tutoring at Sydney Uni, Dennis Altman got a job there. Met through Rob Cooper.	Dennis Altman
00700	Merewether Building was a hotbed of radicalism with Dennis, Lex, Sue Wills, Ernie Chapels. Lots of academics were activists. Could do a lot through the uni.	Radicalism Lex Watson, Sue Wills, Ernie Chapels
00810	Several gay colleagues around him, that's when they set up GUTS (Gay Union of Tertiary Staff)	GUTS Gay Union of Tertiary Staff
00920	Most uni depts had weekly seminars. Gay stuff was being discussed. Once CAMP INC started, a lot of stuff was discussed. New Left was very good. Homosexual law reform was a topic. E.g. Don Aitkin. It was slow in Australia – ideas were not radical or new, given what was happening overseas.	CAMP INC Homosexual law reform
01120	Lex Watson talked about homosexual law reform in class. Garry and Robert Aldrich did a course on minorities – comparative between women, blacks and homosexuals.	Lex Watson Robert Aldrich
01415	CAMP INC – had factional fights but was a wonderful safe place to start. Dennis had been to the Delmont meeting. Garry went to the first meeting in Balmain. Wrote an article in the Bulletin about it. But published anonymously as still didn't have tenure.	CAMP INC The Bulletin
01610	In 1969, went to Chameleons in Petersham, got bashed up outside. Stopped a police wagon to ask for help, but they sent them to a police station miles away. Garry wrote an article about that – front page of the Bulletin, then on front page of the Sunday Telegraph. Interviewed by cops. So aggressive.	Chameleons, Petersham Bashing Sunday Telegraph Polics
02120	Gay Lib households in Glebe, New Left, community focused. In the eastern suburbs, more old style queens.	
02215	CAMP INC meetings in Darling St. Balmain. Committed to improving life for gay people. First Mardi Gras brought the commercial and activism groups together.	First Mardi Gras
02430	Really enjoyed the gay commercial scene over the activism. Never really got involved in Gay Lib outside the uni.	
02540	By late 1970s, Lex [Watson] and Garry had started their interviews for their book. And started Sydney and Australian Gay History Project with monthly seminars.	Sydney and Australian Gay History Project
02700	Remembers the posters for the National Homosexual Conferences	
02930	Remembers parties on campus. Mother Boats danced in stilettos and not much else.	
03050	Quit job in 1971-2, went overseas. But came back to Sydney back into own job. Economic History was expanding at that time. A compulsory course. Offered jobs at Newcastle, UNSW and Sydney. But stayed at Sydney Uni.	
03330	Gradually expanding area of interest into gay history.	Gay history
03400	Report for Rail transport. History of competition and laws.	

03500	Uni didn't like his research – in the wrong area (gay history). Didn't get another promotion after that.	
03720	The pubs in town. The Carlton Rex downstairs bar. Great on Friday and Saturday nights. Quite mixed. Saltmeat Ally pubs were more working class. The Montgomery over Pymont Bridge was much rougher – would go there for the merchant marines. Navy sailors at the Chevron in the Cross. Quarter Deck downstairs. Was safer there. The Rock n Roll was not so safe. The cocktail set were not his bag.	Carlton Rex The Montgomery The Chevron Quarter Deck Rock n Roll
04310	Social circles: difficult once became radical – would end up arguing. Went there for a fuck, but ended up arguing politics. Socially conservative scene. Easier to go to a beat.	
04530	Beats: Maroubra near the rifle range. The walk between Tamarama and Bondi – a magical place. In the caves under the cliffs, guys having sex. Giles Baths in Coogee. Bondi Pavilion.	Beats Maroubra, Tamarama, Bondi. Coogee
04830	Times in court: for nude swimming at Lady Jane beach. In the dying days of Eric Willis. Neville Wran jumped on the arrests as a waste of police resources.	Lady Jane beach Neville Wran
05045	National Service: On Saturday nights would go to pubs in the city. Had sex with one of a set of twins in his group – could never remember which was which. Was very athletic, enjoyed the drills. A great time.	National Service
05425	1978, had started the book with Lex and were doing their oral histories.	
05535	Can't remember how got involved in Mardi Gras. Thought it was just going to be another event. Walking down the street, yelling Out of the bars and into the street. Got as far as Hyde Park. Missed the agro later. Garry peeled off into the Saddletracks Bar. Picked up a horse trainer and had a great night. Heard what he'd missed the next day.	First Mardi Gras Saddletracks Bar
10015	Mardi Gras lost its political and offensive bite over the years. Had wonderful moments. The International Bears impressed him most. Now too mainstream (if talking about marriage). We should be talking about gay refugees, antidiscrimination.	
10310	Book on history of gay Sydney with Lex. Garry eventually published the book as City of the Plain. Another book 'Being Different: Nine Gay Men Remember' emerged from the interviews as well. 'Words from the Same Heart' came out later.	History publishing City of the Plain Being Different Words from the Same Heart
10550	Sydney History Group: focus turned to urban history with Sylvia Hale publishers. Became a speech writer for Sylvia in Greens Party in State Parliament.	Sydney History Group Sylvia Hale
10800	Discusses various history publications.	

11000	Editing the 'Who's who' with Robert Aldrich	Who's who in Gay and Lesbian History
11130	GUTS: met once a month in Merewether. A support group for gay research (when possibly career damaging); politically involved. Not terribly formal. Day diaries are in the Mitchell Library.	GUTS
11330	Australian Centre for Gay Research with Robert Aldrich at Sydney Uni. A means of stimulating gay research. Got a lot of support but not from Chancellor. Governor General agreed to open the centre. So the uni had to let it go ahead. John Hart was one of the first directors. But he alienated all the community groups. Garry was co-director for the last two years of his career. The centre folded. Function: Scholars from overseas were supported to come for visits. Monthly seminars. Symbolic value too.	Australian Centre for Gay Research Robert Aldrich
11910	HIV/AIDS: Garry wrote about scapegoating with pandemics. Other unis were researching AIDS. First meeting at Paddington Town Hall chaired by Lex. Knew Bobby Goldsmith through Eastern suburbs cocktail circuit. Talks about the many people who died. Involved in many of the studies. Went to demos. Informally looked after friends when they became ill.	HIV/AIDS
12520	Garry's focus always on the history. Most important is: If you can prove that you have been there, you are as legitimate as anyone else. History legitimates you.	