

Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Bruce Laidlaw

Interviewer: Michael Mullins

Date of interview: 19 June 2024

Location of interview: Marrickville

Reason for interview: Religion, Acceptance

Restrictions: None



Time	Summary	Keywords
0:35	Born in Scotland 1943. Just at the end of the war. Went out to Egypt. Photos of him riding a camel. Eldest of 7 children. All boys, 1 girl, a lesbian. We lived in Bo'ness near Edinburgh. Went to school in Edinburgh, a small Catholic school. Run by a Catholic order of brothers. New. No bullying. No sex education.	Family School
2:54	Fell in love with a straight boy Jim. Wrote him a love letter. He read it and gave it a laugh. I didn't know about gay. I just knew I loved him. He was sitting with a friend William, whom I pushed aside. I made contact with him later on. Kept up a correspondence through email for several years. I apologised to William.	Schoolboys
4:51	A happy childhood though one of his brothers died of leukemia. About 1950. I don't remember much trauma, just sadness. The family was not so religious. My father was a Catholic, my mother was not. My father's parents had converted to Catholicism. Rare in Scotland. We went to church every week. They were disappointed when I decided to join the Brothers. 'Your daddy's going to give you an MG if you leave'. I was in England at the Brothers' training college. A lot of Irish boys came over.	Family religion Religious Brothers
7:48	A positive experience. A sense that it was a safe place for me. You didn't have to get married. I did have a girlfriend for a while, Frances Kelly. Another thing. I was in a bus in Edinburgh. I'd been looking at another boy's crotch. He said 'Did you like what you were looking at?'	Girlfriend ogling
9:48	In the Brothers we never talked about sex. There wasn't any abuse that I came across. But it was happening in other schools. Except there was a glamorous priest in the country. He used to take the boys in his speedboat. He's now in jail because he used to nude sunbake in the boat and raped some boys. It was fortunate I never got on to his boat. I was a bit slow on the uptake on some things. It was about that time that I was talking to another of the brothers and said I thought I might be bisexual. Celibacy was not a trial.	Schools Celibacy
13:01	I was so delighted to discover masturbation. We had cubicles in the Brothers' training college. I could hear the boy in the next cubicle masturbating. I learned. At the start I thought it was a sin and confessed it, then I didn't worry about it. Scruples didn't feature in my life. We weren't very religious at home. It felt	Masturbation Religious scruples

	common sense that something that felt so good shouldn't be wrong.	
15:44	My family emigrated to Australia in 1965. I enquired with the brothers in Australia and came out on a boat. Panama. Tahiti. Adjustment to the Australian Brothers. Much the same as England. I remember my parents settled in Adelaide. The first year they booked a holiday in Queensland. I was allowed to go with them. Magnetic Island. I flew up there. I missed the ferry from the mainland. A man came up and made approaches. I ejaculated. That was the first time I ever had contact with another man. I was happy about it.	Emigration Cruising
20:40	I didn't feel too constrained. I had a few little encounters but was quiet about it. In the country we had a ute. There was a music festival in Mulwala. Sometimes I'd head to Sydney in the ute with the other brothers. Once I got a speeding caution from the police. I never had any sex with other brothers. Except one of the brothers at the end pulled me aside to suck his cock. I complied. Some of the brothers had contact with children but I never saw any of the other brothers contacting each other sexually. We were told not to have PFs (particular friendships). We used to say the Rosary in pairs. I was reprimanded for always being with Brother Raymond. It was not sexual. We were also forbidden to visit others in their rooms. I was caught visiting a brother who was sick.	Brothers friendships
26:35	I never had any bad feelings when I was in the Brothers. Around about 1978, I was back in Sydney in one of the schools. There was a gay Catholic group called Acceptance. I read about it in The Australian. I met Garry Pye the founder. He was so delighted that a Brother would join them. I started going every week and got more and more involved. I used to help with the masses and helping the priests. We set up a counselling service. We put stickers up in toilets. Macquarie University where I was studying. I was never very involved with the other groups such as CAMP. I was involved in the gay and lesbian choir. We did a recording with the ABC in William Street.	Brothers Acceptance Garry Pye
31:37	1978 was the first Mardi Gras. Acceptance had a VW van. The morning march. In the evening we were at the back of the march. I was driving the Acceptance van. We were able to drive up on to the grass at Hyde Park. I went up with all the other tail enders to William Street. Dressed in my clerical gown. I remember a bus on Darlinghurst Road tooting its horn. I wasn't involved in the arrests. I felt strongly but I was at the end of the march. My superiors didn't know I was there. At the time they were happy for me to do my own thing. In 1979 there was a different leader who quizzed me about it. He suggested seeking theological advice from Many priests training college. It was	1978 Mardi Gras Leaving Brothers

	quite clear we weren't going to get agreement. The superior told me to leave Acceptance. I left the Brothers instead.	
37:14	They agreed readily that I should leave. I had a diploma in special education so had no trouble finding employment. I went back to Britain for a year, taught in a school Then I returned to Sydney, got a job in TAFE Bankstown. I worked in TAFE for the rest of my work life – 20 years.	TAFE
39:52	I stayed in Acceptance for a while but grew away from it because I was becoming less religious. I got involved with another group – Hands On massage, massaging AIDS patients in Darlinghurst. Ward 17.	Hands On massage HIV/AIDS Ward 17
42:29	I had a little run in with the police. I went to a pub in The Rocks. On the way back I called into the Central Station toilets, around 1981 or 1982. I went into a cubicle and immediately the railway police were hammering at the door. I still had my drivers licence with Rev Brother on it. I was a bit startled. The police were very disappointed with they discovered that the young man was not a minor. I had to go to court. I went to see John Marsden. It was a first offence and I got off without a conviction. I agreed to see a psychiatrist.	Police Beats John Marsden
46:05	It didn't chasten me but I was always a bit cautious. However then I went to Thailand for a holiday. I was astonished by the gay bars. A lot of the young men would latch on to the westerners and I was a bit reluctant. I decided to get a job there and stay for a year. In Sydney I'd never met anybody in the gay bars. I would go to some places in Oxford Street. Dancing. I hardly ever went home with anybody. I was looking for a partner but the one night stand thing didn't appeal. That is maybe why I went to Thailand. I taught English. I also worked for the Thai army and the Thai tax department.	Thailand
50:51	I met my now partner Noi. My mother was there staying with me. My mother met him the same day as I did. He'd stay overnight. He asked his parents about going with me to Australia. They were rice farmers in the country. But Noi already had a boyfriend in Thailand. He broke up with this boy. He had a mental breakdown because of what he'd done to this boy. He eventually got better. I didn't know about the relationship until we got back to Sydney.	Partner
54:52	There was a gay immigration task force. They had advice on how to get the visa. When we left Thailand the family had a semi-religious farewell celebration. This was around 1985. We didn't mention his mental problems in the application. His younger sister had kids and her husband had just died. She got a visa to come to Australia. Noi went back to Thailand to look after his mother and adopted his sister's little boy, Prom.	Immigration

59:45	The Thai restaurants. Noi was working as a waiter in the restaurants. Won a drag competition though he doesn't do drag any more. We started a Thai restaurant in Surry Hills and lived in a flat above. My brother in law then found a Thai restaurant in King Street Newtown. We ran that for five years and was successful with students. We sold out just before COVID.	Thai restaurants
1:03:00	Currently not so much involvement with the LGBT community. In the 78ers. Have been to one of their dinners. I'm more inclined to stay home. I send out an LGBT email every day. I have coffee with a gay friend once a week. I was dragged along to a birthday party at Pollys.	Daily email
1:05:36	Current contact with the Brothers. I saw a death notice. I went along to the funeral at Rookwood and joined them for lunch. They were all delighted to see me. Now I go to all the funerals. They are all on their last legs. I could take Noi along but he wouldn't enjoy it.	Funerals
1:07:29	About the marriage before it became legal in Australia. Because I was born in the UK we could get married at the British Consulate in Sydney. All Noi's Sydney family members came along.	Marriage
1:10:02	Advice to people these days? No, not anymore. I have given away the whole Church business. Poor old Pope Francis is making an effort but nothing much will come of it. There is good progress around the world in some countries but not others. Regarding Acceptance, its decline. The church is really just a millstone around people's necks. Christian churches are all a bit pointless.	Church
1:13:19	Noi was a Buddhist. His brother in law tried to get him involved with a fundamentalist Christian Church which tried to cure Noi of his homosexuality. Too many fanatics!	Fundamentalism