

Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Joseph Chetcuti

Interviewer: John Witte

Date of interview: 28 October 2016

Location of interview: Ben Ledi, 186 Glebe Point Road, Glebe

Reason for interview: First Mardi Gras

Restrictions: Yes. [Written permission to publish granted 18/12/24]



Time	Summary	Keywords
0045	Born 1948 in Paola a village in Malta. The family later moved to Valetta. Father was the editor of a newspaper.	Paola; Malta; Valetta;
0120	Desire to become a Franciscan priest. Belonged to the Society of Christian Doctrine. Early political leaning was conservative. Period of Prime Minister Mintoff.	Society of Christian Doctrine; Dom Mintoff;
0240	Comes to Australia in 1964. Lived in Paddington. It was a migrant area. Worked as a clerical assistant with Department of Social Security near Wynyard.	Paddington; Department of Social Security;
0530	He suddenly became aware he liked guys. No books that helped understand what homosexuality was. Only understanding was of the sissy stereotype from his time back in Malta.	Homosexuality;
0715	He was called up for National Service but joined the Franciscans. Anglesea, North Wales as a novice. Same sex feelings more intense. Returned to Kellyville. Problems keeping vow of obedience. Catholic Church trained him to look at things objectively.	National Service; Franciscans; Kellyville; Anglesea Wales;
0940	Control of same sex attraction in the Church. The novices were told how bad homosexuality was and certain friendships were bad.	Homosexuality; Catholic Church;
1145	Spoke to the founder of Brothers of St Gerard Majella about his homosexuality and was given a referral to a pro-gay psychologist priest at St Vincents Hospital in 1972.	Brothers of St Gerard Majella; St Vincents Hospital;
1305	Contact made with Peter Bonsall-Boone and Cross+Section. They met at Terry Street, Balmain. Life changing experience.	Peter Bonsall-Boone; Cross+Section;
1500	Catching a bus to Cross+Section with Cathy French, a drag queen.	Cathy French;
1550	About ten people came to meetings, sitting around in the front room in Terry Street.	Terry Street; Balmain;
1605	Ken Burgin and Gary Pye took him to the Adonis coffee shop in Kings Cross.	Ken Burgin; Gary Pye; Adonis Coffee Shop;
1625	After Cross+Section meetings they would plaster toilets with Phone-a-Friend stickers.	Cross Section; Phone-a-friend;
1715	The agenda of meetings included how they would respond to attitudes of the church. Unlike Acceptance and MCC, Cross+Section trained people to return back to the church and raise issue of homosexuality.	Acceptance; Metropolitan Community Church;

1805	When people came out they needed friends that they could relate to.	Coming out;
1830	Did not get involved in wider activities of CAMP. However, he did take part in the theological response to the Anglican Church Report on Homosexuality. This was important for being the first gay Christian response to an Anglican report.	CAMP; Anglican Church Report on Homosexuality;
1905	Later involved in a report to find alternative premises for CAMP and he was a regular visitor to 33A Glebe Point Road coffee shop.	CAMP; 33a Glebe Point Road, Glebe;
1930	The coffee shop was a place to argue and discuss issues. For example he discussed issues, tactics with Ian Craigie.	Coffee Shop; Ian Craigie;
1955	Alleged unethical behaviour by some counsellors.	Phone-a-friend;
2210	Gary Pye came to him to tell him he was forming a Catholic group and Joseph became a member. A trip to South Australia to establish an Acceptance Group.	Gary Pye; Acceptance; South Australia;
2330	Wrote an article for <i>Cosmos</i> run by Neville Drury. There had been discussion about forming a local version of an American church. There was opposition. But MCC came about and members of CAMP and Cross+Section joined.	Cosmos; MCC; CAMP; Cross Section;
2415	He was a regular at MCC and after they would later go to Apollos. Agenda was social and political. "Asserting identity was incredibly political."	Apollo Bar;
2445	There was a spectrum. Cross+Section was sending members back as "missionaries", Acceptance was about having masses at the homes of individuals. It did not want to be an independent church like MCC.	Cross Section; Acceptance; Metropolitan Community Church;
2520	The achievement of Acceptance. Gary Pye "was a political animal". For example Acceptance leafletted the Sacred Heart Church, Darlinghurst. Gary Pye was of Irish Catholic background. He was sending letters to priests asking them about their attitudes to homosexuality. The church had just come out of the Second Vatican Council which was empowering the laity and increasing tolerance.	Acceptance; Gary Pye; Sacred Heart Church; Second Vatican Council;
2830	Gay Pride Week 1973. The demonstration took off and he joined in and he only went a couple of blocks. He had gone along to have a look.	Gay Pride Week 1973;
3330	Status of his faith at this time. Cross+Section was a way he could get into the gay movement through meeting people like himself.	Cross Section; gay movement;
3550	Point of questioning everything during training to be a priest. A physical encounter with a fellow friar led him to the conclusion that same-sex attraction could not be a sin.	
3640	1974 – 1978. Studied Political Science at University of NSW. Masters in Political Science, research on the Liberal Party tactics of obstruction.	University of NSW; Liberal Party;

3800	Arrival of Fraser. The gay movement lost a lot of steam. Sydney Gay Liberation became Gay Liberation Front. Demonstrations lessened. (JW puts a counter point of view)	Malcolm Fraser; Sydney Gay Liberation; Gay Liberation Front;
3935	Joseph attended the 1976, 1978 Sydney National Homosexual Conferences. In 1976 he was recorded by television crew and this was seen by his parents.	National Homosexual Conferences;
4245	His coming out was easy. His parents had seen a lot in Malta. He became confident and assertive.	Malta; coming out;
4445	The events of 1978. CAMP had a wide membership representative of the gay and lesbian community at large. Wednesdays (Women's night) attracted radical or separatist lesbian feminists, and during the rest of the week lesbians who were not as political went to CAMP. Lesbians were in the minority during the rest of the week.	CAMP; Women's night; Lesbian feminists;
4740	Ron Austin, Lance Gowland, Marg McMann, Robyn Plaister, Robyn Kennedy, Peter de Waal resigned from CAMP in January 1979. Demonstrations and arrests (in 1978) - people felt this (tactic) was backfiring. There was "a move within CAMP to become more mainstream". GAYFED was formed, taken over by radicals like Di Minnis, Frank Howarth, Robyn Kennedy or Plaister, and this was not the intention. CAMP was antagonised and this resulted in Terry Goulden, John Greenway, Bob Hay, Paul Smith then taking over CAMP. Council of Gay Groups took over from GAYFED. Joseph sided with the activists.	Ron Austin; Lance Gowland; Marg McMann; Robyn Plaister; Robyn Kennedy; Peter de Waal; Di Minnis; Frank Howarth; Robyn Kennedy; Terry Goulden; John Greenway; Bob Hay; Paul Smith; CAMP; GAYFED; COGG;
5225	Question was why did Goulden/Greenway mobilise the conservative groups? To make them politically different.	Terry Goulden; John Greenway;
5300	Joseph believes the (drop the charges) demos were getting bigger. But the march at the National Conference was pushing the gay movement into support of abortion rights rather than being a single issue movement. The November 4 th demo was seen as a disaster with only 250 attending. At that point Goulden and Hay decided to "stop the rot".	Terry Goulden; Bob Hay; National Conference; Drop the Charges; Abortion Rights;
5430	At the meeting the activists left. A motion had been put that CAMP leave GAYFED. A counter motion to re-join and that was lost decisively. Chris Wright and Kym Skinner also left.	CAMP; GAYFED; Chris Wright; Kym Skinner;
5515	Believes the times had changed by 1978.	Whitlam;
5830	In 1978 Joseph was studying political science at university. Going to the bars, enjoying himself. On Friday and Saturday nights he and his friends went to venues like Castelllos, Palms, Patches, Capriccios. Another regular haunt during the day was City Gym on William Street. He went with Greg to the discos. He wore snakeskin platform shoes. Trendy "Gerard" trackpants, tight	Kings Cross; College Street; Castelllos; Palms; Patches; Capriccios; City Gym; fashion;

	fitting short sleeved muscle T shirt. People were concerned about appearance.	
10610	Muscles. He preferred City Gym, Broadway Gym over Fitness Exchange. Broadway Gym was run by Jen Jenson, a well known wrestler. He would take 40 vitamin and herbal steroid pills a day. Broadway Gym was straight.	City Gym; Fitness Exchange; Jen Jenson; Broadway Gym;
10755	He remembers Craig Johnston and Brian McGahen as a couple at 33a.	Craig Johnston; Brian McGahen;
10915	Bodybuilding was about being a disco queen.	Bodybuilding; fashion;
11120	He was part of 33a but can't recall any specific organising being done for the parade.	
11210	Arrived early at Taylor Square. A small crowd of 50. People were concerned it would be a flop. Then bar people gathered and made the numbers. The activists were the minority. He wore a velour top, with sequins, tight pants. He was there with friends. He saw Bernard O'Rourke. The music was Tom Robinson, Meg Christian, salsa, Robyn Archer's <i>Dicks don't grow on trees</i> . He was told police were objecting to this song.	Mardi Gras; Taylor Square; Bernard O'Rourke; Tom Robinson; Meg Christian; Robyn Archer; Police;
11615	There were verbal conditions for the parade given to Lance by the police such as "no music". There was also two starting times one on the poster and one in the Weekend Australian. The marchers weren't aware of the conditions of the permit.	Lance Gowland; Weekend Australian; parade permit;
11725	There were younger acquaintances from the bars also on the parade. People like Ian Smith from CAMP also went to the bars.	CAMP; Ian Smith;
11830	Believes he was at the front near the music because he was dancing.	
11915	People from different backgrounds came together for the first time to celebrate.	
11950	Thinks the police were moving the parade from the centre of the street.	Police;
12040	Can't recall the incidents at College Street. But remembers going down Stanley Street, because there was the Missionary House of St Paul – an organisation of Maltese priests there, as an act of defiance.	College Street; Stanley Street; Missionary House of St Paul;
12220	Walking through East Sydney/Darlinghurst and being watched by police was the usual Saturday night. He would have been with Greg and people from 33a.	
12507	Sense of being part of a crowd. Aware of support for the marchers. He was part of one group of many and was not aware of "impending doom".	
12730	Not aware of how the fracas started. Some people fought back and this surprised him. People were not shrinking violets. He did not try to get arrested.	

13000	Then went back to Darlinghurst Police Station via Green Park. The chants were “ho ho homosexual”; “not the church not the state, homosexuals will decide their fate”. He left around 3am.	Darlinghurst Police Station; Green Park;
13145	Remembers a lesbian outside the police station doors on all fours oinking like a pig. Eventually one policeman lost his temper and took her inside and the crowd clapped. She was thrown back out and was not arrested.	Darlinghurst Police Station;
13300	Peter Mitchell tells a motorist “piss off you boring straight”. The Branco photos 04 and 05 of a scuffle in Forbes Street were not part of the motorist incident.	Peter Mitchell; Branco Gaica; Forbes Street;
13530	Not part of the Liverpool Street Court demo in the forecourt. Can’t remember the 15 July demo. Didn’t go on the National Conference demonstration.	Liverpool Street Court; National Conference;
13700	He became more active as a result of the Mardi Gras. He moved in the Maltese community later on as openly gay and was a pariah.	Maltese community; Mardi Gras;
13900	His father encouraged his involvement in the Maltese community. James Jupp compiled the encyclopaedia of the Australian people.	James Jupp;
13950	His other activism was poetry with the (mixed group) Glebe School of Poets. Included Joanna Burns. Readings at the Central Street Gallery. They read at Martin Place on late night shopping nights. He read “I like my men to be men”. The group also went to the Adelaide Festival. The group challenged the traditional form of poetry.	Glebe School of Poets; Joanna Burns; Central Street Gallery; Martin Place; Adelaide Festival;
14245	Lectureship on Maltese Studies after university. The aim was to teach language but introduced other Maltese topics to build interest. He included study of a book which had a homosexual theme. Upset conservatives and the course was cancelled. Uproar when he attempted to give a paper on the gay movement in Malta.	Maltese Studies; <i>The Strange One</i>
14550	Federated Clerks Union. Lindsay Tanner was the President. The ACOA in his workplace attracted Anglo-Saxon drunks. Migrants felt on the outer and there was a move into the FCU.	Federated Clerks Union; ACOA; Lindsay Tanner;
14915	Joseph’s work on the history of the Mardi Gras. Began in 1996 with a couple of interviews. Found that this story of the origin contradicts some of the current narratives. He has examined some of the claims. Who were the organisers of the first parade. Lance Gowland, Marg McMann and Ron Austin were critical. The story is being re-told and re-invented. The flexibility of the term “political”, “demonstration”.	Mardi Gras; Lance Gowland; Marg McMann; Ron Austin;