

Presentation for the RAINBOW VISIONS HUNTER
AGEING FORUM

Saturday, 17 July 2004

Alice Ferguson Centre, Merewether (Newcastle)

**YOU DON'T HAVE TO ROLL UP YOUR
BANNER WHEN YOU'RE SIXTY!**

**AGEING AND GAY AND LESBIAN (AND
TRANSGENDER) COMMUNITIES**

MANNIE DE SAXE AND KEN LOVETT

MANNIE

WE WISH TO THANK RAINBOW VISIONS FOR MAKING THIS FORUM POSSIBLE AND TO BE GIVING MUCH NEEDED PUBLICITY TO THE ISSUE OF GAY, LESBIAN AND TRANSGENDER AGEING IN THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY IN GENERAL, AND THE HUNTER REGION IN PARTICULAR.

HAVING BEEN PART OF THE NEWCASTLE HIV/AIDS AND OTHER COMMUNITIES, WE ARE VERY MUCH AT HOME HERE AND PLEASED TO BE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FORUM.

AT OUR AGE WE SHOULD BE LYING HORIZONTALLY, PROSTRATE, PREFERABLY IN NURSING HOMES OUT OF SIGHT AND MIND, NOT BEING ACTIVE OR ACTIVIST, AND SILENT ON ALL ISSUES, POLITICAL OR OTHERWISE. INSTEAD, THANKS TO THE HELP OF OUR FAIRY GODMOTHERS - SOME OF WHO WILL NOW BE NAMED AS ROSEMARY BRISTOW, CHRISTINE BIRD AND JO HARRISON, WHO KEEPS US GOING WITH GREAT WIT AND HUMOUR AND UNDERSTANDING OF US GERIATRICES.

COMING OUT AS A GAYMAN IN 1988 AGED 61, AN AGE CONSIDERED VERY MUCH AT THAT TIME IN THE GAY COMMUNITY AS ADVANCED GERIATRIC! ALMOST TERMINAL!!!, MEETING KEN LOVETT IN GAY SOLIDARITY IN SYDNEY AND, IN 1993, BECOMING PARTNERS - STILL BOTH ALIVE AT 77 AND 81 AFTER 11 YEARS TOGETHER, HOPEFULLY AT LEAST ANOTHER GOOD AND HEALTHY 11 YEARS - WE SHOULD BE SO LUCKY!!

KEN

You don't have to roll up your banner when you're sixty!

Another way of putting it, I guess, is
once a gay activist ALWAYS A STIRRER!

However, I was actually 50 in November 1972 when I demonstrated for the very first time in the street as a gay man.

It was in front of St Clements Anglican Church in Mosman at a gay lib protest against the sacking of the church secretary for being open about his homosexuality.

The secretary, Peter Bonsall-Boone, had appeared on the ABC television programme, ChequerBoard, with his lover whom he kissed, together with a lesbian couple.

At the protest I carried a placard on which I had written What I do in bed has nothing to do with my ability to do my job at work!

A bit of a mouthful but it served my purpose.

Ever since I've never stopped writing placards and banners and to carry them in demonstrations in the streets in Sydney, in Melbourne, in Brisbane and, yes, even in Newcastle.

My philosophy is simply if you want things to change, do it yourself!

I don't see any need to alter my philosophy because I'm a really old senior gay guy now.

As gays and lesbians we still need to confront the hetero communities which would still like to keep us in the closet especially if we are senior citizens.

How can you be gay when you're so old? It's a young people's problem!!! Oh, really???

We carry our Lesbian and Gay Solidarity banner not just in gay demos—which anyway are pretty thin on the ground these days—but in street protests about wars, destruction of the environment, the treatment of asylum seekers, government attempts to limit Medicare and trade union issues, to name a few recently.

Not surprisingly, we usually find a few others who see our banner and join us.

MANNIE

ONE OF OUR ACTION GROUPS IS INTERSECTION. IT WAS STARTED IN SYDNEY IN 1996 AFTER CHRISTINE BIRD, WHO WORKED FOR CROSSROADS COMMUNITY CENTRE, WAS GIVEN A GRANT TO PRODUCE A REPORT FOR SUTHERLAND SHIRE COUNCIL.

THE REPORT WAS CALLED THE TOLERANCE REPORT AND DEALT WITH THE ISSUE OF SEXUAL MINORITIES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS. CHRISTINE BIRD SENT THE REPORT TO AS MANY GAY AND LESBIAN ORGANISATIONS AS SHE COULD FIND, AND ASKED FOR COMMENTS AND TO CONVENE A MEETING

AT WHICH PEOPLE COULD DISCUSS WHAT TO DO NEXT.

THE FIRST MEETINGS INCLUDED PEOPLE FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS, STATE HEALTH AND OTHER RELATED DEPARTMENTS, REPRESENTATIVES OF MANY GAY, LESBIAN, TRANSGENDER, HIV/AIDS, DISABILITY AND SIMILAR TYPES OF ORGANISATIONS, AND INDIVIDUALS WHO HOPED TO BE ABLE TO MAKE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEBATE ON SEXUAL MINORITIES.

BY THE TIME KEN AND I MOVED TO MELBOURNE IN 2001, INTERSECTION HAD ACHIEVED SOME INTERESTING RESULTS, BUT THE GROUP WAS LEFT AS A RUMP, WITH FOUR OF US STILL ACTIVE AND INVOLVED. OUR MAIN ACHIEVEMENT HAD BEEN TO GET CHANGES MADE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANDATORY AND NON-MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTAIN MINORITY GROUPS. IN MAY 1998 THE NSW DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT PUBLISHED TWO DOCUMENTS:

Social/Community Planning and Reporting: GUIDELINES

Social/Community Planning and Reporting: MANUAL

IN PARAGRAPH 2.2 - MANDATORY TARGET GROUPS - THERE ARE SEVEN CATEGORIES.

IN PARAGRAPH 2.3 - OPTIONAL TARGET GROUPS - THE FOLLOWING ITEM WAS STATED:

COUNCILS MAY ALSO CONSIDER INCLUDING INFORMATION IN THE PLAN ABOUT OTHER SPECIFIC GROUPS RELEVANT TO THEIR COMMUNITY. THESE GROUPS COULD INCLUDE LOW INCOME EARNERS, GAY/LESBIAN AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE, FAMILIES, NEW RESIDENTS AND PEOPLE WHO ARE UNEMPLOYED..

KEN

Gerontology for lesbians and gays

So ... who got a geriatric couple like us involved in a forum like this one ... a researcher in the field of lesbian and gay gerontology. None other than Jo Harrison, a PH.D student at the University of South Australia.

We filled in her study questionnaire back in 1997 while I was still living in Newcastle and Mannie in Sydney. The next thing we knew we were being interviewed. Then we were agreeing to take part in Forum on ageing issues at Feast, the Adelaide lesbian and gay cultural festival, in 2001 followed by another forum a year later in 2002 at Sydney University --inflicting difference on age-care health services at the Health in Difference Conference.

Jo is given to guiding her subjects into ways that others fear to tread and wouldn't you know ... it's good for them!

MANNIE

IN MID-1999 THE ANTI-DISCRIMINATION BOARD CONVENED A MEETING TO DISCUSS PROPOSALS FOR A FORUM THEY INTENDED TO HOLD CALLED "AGE DISCRIMINATION FORUM." WE ATTENDED PRELIMINARY MEETINGS TO DISCUSS ITEMS FOR THE AGENDA, AND BECAUSE WE KNEW WE WOULD BE

AWAY WHEN THE FORUM WAS TO BE HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 1999, WE PUT FORWARD ITEMS OF DISCRIMINATION WHICH WE WANTED DISCUSSED. WE ALSO ASKED THAT JO HARRISON'S RESEARCH PROJECT "TOWARDS A GAY AND LESBIAN PRESENCE IN GERONTOLOGY IN AUSTRALIA" BE PUT ON THE AGENDA AS WE WERE TO BE REPRESENTED AT THE FORUM BY CHRISTINE BIRD FROM OUR INTERSECTION GROUP.

THE FORUM WAS DULY HELD, BUT THERE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN NO DEVELOPMENT FROM IT.

SO, BECAUSE WE WERE NOW INVOLVED WITH GAY, LESBIAN AND TRANSGENDER AGEING ISSUES IN MELBOURNE, WE CONTACTED THE ADB TO HAVE THE ISSUE PUT ON THE AGENDA OF THE ADB'S GAY AND LESBIAN CONSULTATION, WHICH IS HELD 3 OR 4 TIMES A YEAR.

THIS WAS PUT ON THE AGENDA IN DECEMBER 2003, DISCUSSED AT THE CONSULTATION IN MARCH 2004, AND IS AGAIN ON THE AGENDA FOR THE 21 JULY CONSULTATION, NEXT WEEK, WHICH WE INTEND TO BE PRESENT AT. YESTERDAY'S SEMINAR AND TODAY'S FORUM WILL BE USEFUL SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR DISCUSSION AT THE MEETING.

IN MELBOURNE WE ATTENDED A COUNCIL ON THE AGEING (COTA) SEMINAR ON AGEING ISSUES - GAY AND LESBIAN ISSUES WERE MENTIONED BY US AT THE MEETING. TO DATE, DESPITE NUMEROUS REQUESTS FROM INTERSECTION TO COTA NATIONAL SENIORS, NOW A COMBINED ORGANISATION, THEY STILL DO NOT HAVE GAY AND LESBIAN AGEING ON THEIR POLICY AGENDA - WE ARE NOT FINISHED WITH THEM YET!!!

KEN

The Darebin Connection

Most senior citizens services are in the control of local government councils. Ours in Melbourne is the Darebin City Council.

In 2001 we discovered that Darebin was inviting comment on its Draft Strategy that was the result of a review of its Aged and Disability Services. So we made a submission citing the fact that there was no awareness indicated of the lesbian, gay and transgender members in the community and their needs.

We had an immediate response from the Service Planning Policy Officer who assured us that the Council was aware of its lesbian, gay and transgender residents needs and our comments and suggestions would be incorporated into the final Strategy.

We 'phoned back suggesting that something practical could be done fairly quickly by including an event specifically for gays and lesbians in the forthcoming Seniors Week celebrations. It proved too difficult.

However, it did lead us in a round-about way to getting involved with the Ministerial Advisory Council of Senior Victorians and the official programming of the Victorian Seniors Festival. We suggested a few events which we thought would be of interest to gays and

lesbians. This year, one of our suggestions was incorporated into the official programme.

It was a short Gay Melbourne History Walk for seniors conducted by the president of the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives.

However, I've digressed. When Darebin's final Strategy was launched there was no recognition of lesbian, gay and transgender seniors even existing in the council area let alone their needs being met.

The next step we took was to visit our elected ward representative on Darebin Council. He agreed to put forward our request for Council to undertake a research project to discover the extent of the lesbian and gay population of the area and to advise on services, if any, provided by Darebin for the lesbian, gay and transgender population.

It took months and several emails and telephone calls before he eventually took it to a council meeting. We were then interviewed some weeks later by a Council officer who informed us that he would make a report on the matter, which would be presented, to Council.

The report was presented at a Council meeting a couple of months ago and tabled. We have yet to hear that it has been acted upon.

MANNIE

PETER ROBINSON FROM RMIT IN MELBOURNE INTERVIEWED US AS PART OF HIS RESEARCH FOR THE VICTORIAN MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON GAY AND LESBIAN HEALTH ISSUES.

THE ALSO FOUNDATION HELD A SERIES OF MEETINGS TO DISCUSS GAY AND LESBIAN AGEING - WE WENT TO THE THIRD AND LAST MEETING WHICH WAS IN OUR AREA - THE RESULT IS A DOCUMENT WHICH SPEAKS - OR DOESN'T - ABOUT WHAT TO DO - THE REPORT IS CALLED ABOUT TIME - GLBT SENIORS ALSO MATTER - STRATEGIC PLAN.

LEARNING HOW TO OPERATE OUR WEB SITE WHICH WAS SET UP BY TWO OF OUR STAUCHEST SUPPORTERS, SISTER NUN-BUOY, FORMERLY SISTER MARY MARY QUITE CONTRARY, AND BARRY MCKAY WHO USED TO WORK FOR THE ABC AND IS NOW WITH DEUTSCHE WELLE IN GERMANY, HAS ENABLED US TO CREATE INFORMATION BASES WHICH INCLUDE THE INTERSECTION WORK WHICH HAS SET US ON THE GERONTOLOGY PATH.

IN CONCLUSION WE'D LIKE TO TELL YOU ABOUT SOMETHING WE FOUND ON THE WEB RECENTLY - IT SEEMS TO US RELEVANT TO OUR TODAY'S TOPIC:

MANNIE

WILL YOU LOVE ME WHEN I'M OLD AND GAY? BY MARTIN FLYNN
24 March 2003 from uk.gay.com

Lesbians and gay men face increasing isolation as well as legal, health and financial problems as they get older.

A conference of the US Council on Ageing held in Chicago in March 2003 heard that lesbians and gays born in the 'baby boom' years after the Second World War are now approaching retirement age and often face particular psychological, social and legal problems.

These problems are not only different from those facing younger gays, but are also different from those experienced by older heterosexuals.

Martin Walker, author of 'The Ageing Male' told the meeting that the gay world is obsessed by images of youth and health and as they get older many lesbians and gays face a lonely and impoverished retirement.

“The lonely, ageing auntie trying to carry a fragile and varnished Peter Pan quality into middle age is a spectre before the eyes of many homosexuals....Nobody loves you when you're old and gay.”

KEN

Older lesbians and gays tend to be ignored, not just socially but they also have less income and legal rights than older heterosexuals, John Yoakum, a sociologist and co-chair of the US Lesbian and Gay Ageing Network, told the conference.

“The elderly in general tend to be invisible in our youth-orientated society,” he said, “and that's particularly true in the LGBT community. One of our greatest challenges is ageism within our own community.”

Lesbians and gays in particular face an increased risk of violent crime as they get older, Yoakum said. Tax, legal, partnership and inheritance rights are much worse than for older heterosexuals.

MANNIE

Many older gays who have lost friends and partners because of the devastation of AIDS face a particularly lonely old age, he added.

In Britain, the charity Age Concern held a special conference in 2002 into the particular needs of older lesbians and gays. The meeting, called *Opening Doors*, heard that older lesbians and gay men face a double discrimination. Not only do they have to deal with age discrimination but they often face negative attitudes and social injustices because of their sexuality.

In March 2003, *Age Concern* launched a special Helpline for older gay men and lesbians in the North East of England.

(Age Concern's Opening Door Links)

(Visit this article online at <http://uk.gay.com/article/lifestyle/relationships/1724>)