



Philip (Phyllis) McGinness interviewed by Daniel Browning, Darwin, February 2023

Daniel Browning: [00:00:00] Important interviews that I'm gathering. So I want to make sure we get as much of the story as possible. Tape ID this is it's the 9th of February 2023. I'm in Darwin, in Palmerston. And with this is another in this series of oral histories for the Mareeba Indigenous Oral History Project in collaboration with the Sydney Pride. My name is Daniel Browning and I'm interviewing Phillip, Phyllis McGinnis. And which, which, which should I be referring to you? Should I say Phillip or should I feel as well?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:00:38] Phyllis Yeah.

Daniel Browning: [00:00:40] Phil Did you get my fill? Yes. So I'll begin by asking you to introduce yourself and say as much as you want about yeah, what you would say to someone if they said, Who are you?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:00:58] My name is Phillip McGinness. My father is a traditional owner for Litchfield Park and Bachelor. I'm. I lived in Sydney for about ten years back in the eighties and I. I ended up as a prostitute and junkie and. But I always wanted to be that I knew what I wanted to be. So my. Phyllis Life started when I was 18 after I left home, because my parents were very religious and that I wasn't allowed to stay home. Because I wasn't interested. So I moved to my auntie's. As soon as I went there, I chucked on the dress. I end up working as Phyllis at different places, like cleaning. Numb. The prawn factory, Francis by prawn factory, worked there for three years. Two years or three. And. Then I met my. Friend, Mr. Gary Lee. And we became really close friends and. And. I ended up moving in with him. And then maybe after a year or so, we we all made up our minds. We were going to go to Sydney. So there was about ten of us that went to Sydney, all gay and.

Daniel Browning: [00:02:33] And all mob here from Darwin.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:02:34] Yeah, all Aboriginal mob from Darwin and um. Yeah. So we went to Sydney and we ended up living in Chatswood and, and I ended up getting a job in Chatswood as Phyllis as a hearing aid technician. And it was like just a



like a 12 month course. And I would have been a qualified hearing aid technician. But in the meantime, at night, I used to run away to the cross to be a prostitute. And I went back to work there one day and I opened up the Sydney Morning Herald and I look, is it Philip or Phyllis and whole page of story about me had that happened was me and my friend Vicki. We were both working in Sydney at the moment at the time, and detectives come and we knew they were undercover detectives. Yes, and we knew they were detectives and we just jumped in the car and they. Well, when we went to the police station, they were saying that we told them the prices for sex and all that, which we didn't. So that's how come that court case began. In Maine.

Daniel Browning: [00:04:02] Vicki And it was a historic court case.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:04:06] Yeah. Yeah.

Daniel Browning: [00:04:07] And you were accused of soliciting prostitution.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:04:13] We never even approached them. They approached us. So we fought and we end up winning. And then we fought for Vicki because they were sending her in Maine prison while she was a sex change.

Daniel Browning: [00:04:29] So she was undergoing transitional. She actually had a sex change. And so then what? When they had to when she was held in jail, she was held in the men's jail.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:04:39] Yes. And that's early seventy's late seventies and all that. So we ended up the court case, ended up for about five years and went to Supreme Court and then we end up winning it. And.

Daniel Browning: [00:04:56] And did it change the law around how you could be registered, have a law saw people who had transitioned or were transgender? It changed the the rules in a way.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:05:09] Yeah. Yeah.



Daniel Browning: [00:05:10] Yeah. It was a test case.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:05:13] Yeah. So we won it and, um. I was going to show you photos. You might have seen them.

Daniel Browning: [00:05:24] Nixon sent me some photos. It's amazing. From the from the newspaper. A young, a younger year.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:05:31] The lawyer and Vicki never passed away, and I'm the only one left.

Daniel Browning: [00:05:37] So what? Initially it began. So we're talking like, was it in the eighties? Yes. So there's that first court case in which you become kind of, I guess, known in the newspapers.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:05:50] Yeah.

Daniel Browning: [00:05:50] And that was the the police charges of solicitation.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:05:55] Yeah. Yeah. That's when I seen that when I ended up getting charged and everybody heard about it.

Daniel Browning: [00:06:03] That's when Sydney Morning Herald.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:06:05] Yeah. And I did a whole page on on me.

Daniel Browning: [00:06:11] And did you have any idea that that story was being published?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:06:15] No, no, That's why I was I was at work at the hearing aid place and I opened the Morning Herald. And it is it had the big writing philosophy.

Daniel Browning: [00:06:27] And photographs of.



Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:06:27] You know.

Daniel Browning: [00:06:29] Just just a.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:06:29] Headline. It's a headline. So I just closed the paper and went home and never went back.

Daniel Browning: [00:06:35] Could you imagine those old dears getting their hearing aids? Oh, Philip or Phyllis, you were at that time working as Phyllis. So can you tell me if I. If I had. I'm just meeting you for the first time. How is Philip? Different from Phyllis. Like Phyllis? What does Phyllis do? Did you wear a wig or did you have your natural hair?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:06:54] Natural hair? Yeah.

Daniel Browning: [00:06:57] The hair was kept long.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:06:58] Natural than then a normal trend. Transvestite transsexual. So. That's how I got away with it.

Daniel Browning: [00:07:09] And so can I just ask you, I mean, on your in terms of your mobs, you're like from here, just just down South Litchfield National Park, that that's your country. So maybe just tell me a little bit about your mum and dad and and your immediate family like was a big mob. You don't have to go into too much detail, but yeah, Where did you. Did you grow up here in Darwin? In the suburbs.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:07:34] Yeah. Yeah. Well, I grew up in Rabbit Creek and Robert Rabbit. Yeah, Yeah. But before that we. I grew up in Litchfield Park.

Daniel Browning: [00:07:46] In the home.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:07:47] Country. Yeah. On country. And, and then the government, because I was of age for school, the government said that I have to come



to town to go to school. So we had to move into town to housing. And but before that, my father worked for the railways and I. We used to live at that railway museum just before Humpty Do turn off. We used to live there and then we moved to. To Daily Street Bridge and then from Daily Street Bridge to Rubber Creek.

Daniel Browning: [00:08:27] And then which you went to school. Some people say around seven or eight, they realize they're different.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:08:34] Yeah. But I always knew I always knew what I wanted. And because of being my family, being religious Jehovah Witness, it wasn't allowed. So that's why at 1617, I left home. I didn't want to be part of that. That scene. And that's when I started. Phyllis. Phyllis came out, but I knew what I wanted. I always wanted to be Phyllis, and that's why I'm going back as Phyllis. But as Phillip. I didn't want to. Go to any you and drag or half semi drag, whatever. So I just went back as Phillip and I ended up getting a community and science community and health degree and I became a health worker and there was about end of. The eighties. Then I.

Daniel Browning: [00:09:35] This is after Sydney. When you came back to Darwin.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:09:37] Now, this is before I went. I don't know. Oh, yeah. After. Sorry.

Daniel Browning: [00:09:44] It's a long life.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:09:45] You got to remember. That's why I don't remember much of the Sydney life. Because I was on heroin at the time, so. And I. Yes, I end up. Now after that will happen, after I went back to Phillip because I went to Sydney and stayed there for ten years and then. Gary said, Well, why don't you go and do some training or something for what you like? So I said, I'll do health workers. Became a health worker, went to bachelor college for about. Four or five years. Then I ended up getting a job at Bagot. Community Health Center. I work there for two years and then I end up getting a job with an bar and then ended up there for 15 years.



Daniel Browning: [00:10:43] And now we're we're meeting at Big W. You work here, You'll hear the announcements occasionally.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:10:49] Yeah. Yeah. So I'm. Yeah. After Daniella Dilbar, I ended up working at the Royal Darwin Hospital. I worked there for two years and now I'm here in Big W at Palmerston.

Daniel Browning: [00:11:05] And not far off retiring.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:11:07] Yeah. Yes. I only got three or four years to go and because I want to get ten years out of Big W. So for years.

Daniel Browning: [00:11:19] Now, Kung Arkin is the is your mob?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:11:21] Yeah.

Daniel Browning: [00:11:21] And can I ask if just you just have to say, if a big or small family was there just in terms of brothers and sisters, I know we all got Big Bob's, but.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:11:30] Our family was pretty small. There was only me and my brother, Johnny McInnis and me, but we had the best life growing up. My father was a stolen generation, so when he was a kid he was taken from country to and put into color and compound and color and compound is on the end of Mitchell Street. That that's where the old hospital used to be. And my father grew up there. And then I lived in the bush next door. And. Yeah, but one thing. By my father being taken away. He was very well educated and could do anything he wanted. And like I had the best life growing up, even though he didn't like me being gay. But I knew that. But he still loved me as the son, so. But he'd never, ever accepted it. Only my mother. And now they both gone now. So. I don't really worry anymore. My brother's gone, so I'm the only one left in the family. And I'm waiting for money from the government, from Stolen Generation.

Daniel Browning: [00:12:48] Is that is that. Is that coming through?



Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:12:50] Yeah, yeah, yeah. The government has given the Stolen Generation 55 million to pay all.

Daniel Browning: [00:12:58] Of its not very much money. For what?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:13:01] Not much. We lost.

Daniel Browning: [00:13:02] Will that be for your father? For you?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:13:06] For me? Yeah. Because the government took him away from his land and he wasn't allowed to talk culture or anything. So that's why I don't know culture that much, but I know enough. From other people working in health. So. Yeah.

Daniel Browning: [00:13:26] Now let's. So after school here in Darwin? Yeah. And maybe what happened, like Gary Lee was saying that there was a there was a beat at Estes Beach, I think, and that he's kind of I guess the dawning of his sexuality was was there and what he remembers there of he met some beautiful Greek fellow and fell in love with him. But then that fellow got married. Was there someone that that that kind of encouraged you to not to be who you are, but was there was there a relationship or some kind of sense of being loved? A love story.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:14:11] Oh, not really. The only love was between me and Gary because Gary's supported me and everything I did and helped me get educated and everything, so. It's just mainly Gary.

Daniel Browning: [00:14:24] That's a love story, too.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:14:26] But when we first met, he thought I was a girl. And I said, No, no, no, no, no. And then we just became very close friends. Never, ever had sex, but. Been together most of my life. So that's the love.



Daniel Browning: [00:14:47] Now, let's go back to that, that journey from Darwin to Sydney. How did you get there? And you said there was ten of you all mob deciding to make the transition to living in Sydney.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:15:06] Yeah, well, some of us went by by plane, Some others come by car. And once we got there, everybody just dispersed and William became a Qantas. Lyle became Centrelink queen. Garry became an artist, Larrakia artist. You might know Eric Renshaw. She was pretty far out. She was into meditation and all that. So but yeah, there was an ad of all of that. I think there's only three or four of us left out of that ten. So it was very interesting laugh we've had.

Daniel Browning: [00:15:59] Do you remember that first night? Were you. What was Sydney like? I mean, it's hard to imagine for me. You know, I first saw Sydney when out in maybe the late eighties, but as a very young person, I mean, what was Sydney like?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:16:14] Sydney was much better then as it is today. Sydney is not the same lot. That's why I was glad I went there when we went there, because we were looked after in the cross. Anyway, in Sydney we were looked after, you know, by Indigenous people or gay people and we just blended in.

Daniel Browning: [00:16:38] Hard to think, you know, Darwin Mob just blending in. But you did. Yeah. Because you were supported. There was a support network.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:16:45] Yeah. Yep. And then I'm. Then I joined. I know. That was after when I came back to. I end up joining some committees, Indigenous Indigenous Committee and. Wendt stayed on there for about maybe six years, six or eight years.

Daniel Browning: [00:17:10] Who was the in terms of Sydney when you got there? Um, Gary talked about how when he was 16, he met some prostitutes in the cross, and they took him in and they gave him, she gave him \$10 to get the next meal and told him to go to Wesley Mission and he got \$20, you know, in that I know there was ten of you together and you probably maybe had a little had a few dollars amongst you. But yeah,



what did was this was this someone who kind of gave you the kind of help that you needed to become part of a community?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:17:42] Well, I was alright because I had Gary there and Gary went there before I did. He went there.

Daniel Browning: [00:17:49] He knew where to go, you know what to do.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:17:50] Ten of us went, Yeah. So Gary knew what Sidney was like and yeah. So Gary was my support there.

Daniel Browning: [00:18:01] And so working in Chatswood fitting hearing aids for old, old dears. Oh, bless. And they had no idea that, you know.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:18:10] As a man until I opened up pipe and seen that. And I said, Oh, no, close it up and went home.

Daniel Browning: [00:18:19] Now I just want to go back to that court case because it was it changed history in terms of, you know. Transgender rights. So when that first case happened and the police accused you of of soliciting for prostitution. I mean, what was your first thought? Were you terrified? I mean, what did you. Did you.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:18:45] We said, no, no, no, no, no. We fought them. Yeah. Because then they never come up and ask us the prices. They just pulled up and we knew straight away who they were, so we just jumped in the car. But they saying that we offered them sex and everything that.

Daniel Browning: [00:19:10] And I mean, you were working as a prostitute. It sounds like you you know, you're fitting hearing aids during the day. And then I guess nighttime was. But it sounds like, you know, the prostitution was was almost like, did you do it because you had to or because you wanted to?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:19:26] Oh, always. I always wanted to be a junkie. I always wanted to be a prostitute. And I was.



Daniel Browning: [00:19:33] Not many people would would admit that to being in their ambitions. But your career ambitions were to be a prostitute and a junkie.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:19:40] Yeah, And I did it. Ten years I stayed in. And I have the experience there and I tell people, do whatever you think you want to do. You know? Because I'm with Aboriginal people, usually they fall back. You know, father and mother. Ah, don't you go that way or, you know. So.

Daniel Browning: [00:20:07] Yeah. Yeah. I'm looking at some of the photos of you from, I think, various newspapers. You're absolutely gorgeous. And. But still, still like, you know, petite, like small stature. And I'm just thinking, you know, we're fine bones, some of us blackfellas. Did you have any trouble because you were so petite?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:20:33] Hmm. Not really. I used to fight with all them prostitutes because the first time I went to the cross, I just chucked myself on the main street right outside of McDonald's. Same local girls used to come there. Hey, you. I said, Oh, I'm Phyllis. Who are you? I said I can work anywhere I want. This is my country. So they really they never, ever hassled me after I told them who I was. And I'm working here. That's it.

Daniel Browning: [00:21:09] So I'm Mom. You don't own this country. I I'm mob. I own this country.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:21:15] Yeah, yeah, yeah. But I end up having a good life with all those girls. We did. Really? Because a lot of the girls. Were single and had children and they worked to educate the child and send them to private school and all that and.

Daniel Browning: [00:21:37] Wow. So when you say the girls, you know, the other prostitutes were most of them. Most of them weren't transgender and most of them were cisgender. Yeah.



Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:21:48] And then that's when the place sort of come down heavy and pushed all the tranny transsexuals on the back streets of Sydney off Bourke Street. That's where that line, you know.

Daniel Browning: [00:22:01] Where you would probably be much more unsafe.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:22:04] Yeah. So we all had to go work there.

Daniel Browning: [00:22:09] And so what would have happened if you had continued to be, you know, on the main street.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:22:15] Public, get hassled by the cops because they all knew we were transsexual and we weren't allowed to work in lacrosse or any of the girls.

Daniel Browning: [00:22:26] Now, that was a kind of unwritten law. A code police enforced.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:22:32] Yeah.

Daniel Browning: [00:22:33] What's your greatest memory of that time? Is it something that really sticks out there, like, Oh, God, that was a best night? Or was it just the whole actually fulfilling your ambitions to be a junkie and a prostitute?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:22:49] Um. Best.

Daniel Browning: [00:22:51] Not this memory.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:22:58] Only. I really. I enjoyed everything I did there.

Daniel Browning: [00:23:03] So you look back on that entire period quite fondly.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:23:06] Yeah. I'm glad I did it because. You end up with? With what's the word? No, I. You become street wise and and you could just tell if



anything's going to happen and you just leave the place before it happens. That caused, you know.

Daniel Browning: [00:23:33] An acute sensitivity to what might happen to threat and danger.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:23:37] Yeah, Yeah. And the only danger I had was when I got raped by one of the customers. And gun held at my head. So I just let him do what everyone wanted. But he took we went right at the back knee near. Industrial area. He took me out there because we had sex in the car. And where it took me. I was really dark. And then. Then I felt that gun on my face. Then he. And he had sex with me and then kicked me out of the car naked. And I'm thinking, Oh, I'm going to fuck on Walker and go back into town naked. But as he left, he was chucking my things out of the car. I was happy when Fred back on the street and worked. That was the only scary part I had. There was that.

Daniel Browning: [00:24:41] And there's no you you don't experience any trauma from that, from that from that episode. You just kind of accepted it was part of your part of the work?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:24:48] Yeah, part of my work. And can't do nothing else about it, you know? But he never, ever came back. That's one thing I was thinking. He might come back, but not never.

Daniel Browning: [00:25:01] He didn't really need to do that. He could have just not paid you. I mean, was that the point? He didn't want to pay for the sex.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:25:07] Yeah. Yeah. And he end up taking the money what I had from other jobs.

Daniel Browning: [00:25:11] So he robbed you?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:25:12] Yeah. Yeah.



Daniel Browning: [00:25:15] Wow. So had a gun. And then he took all your money. How much? How much did he take?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:25:21] Maybe about 200.

Daniel Browning: [00:25:23] That would've been a lot of money back then.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:25:24] Yeah.

Daniel Browning: [00:25:27] So from. Do you remember what year you landed there in Sydney and what year you left?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:25:33] Would have been probably 85. 86. Say that for about. What the end of. Maybe the end of the nineties. I don't really remember much. Dates and.

Daniel Browning: [00:25:54] Times. No one's very good with dates. And it's not really. It's just kind of helps me to kind of think what was happening in Sydney at the time. But I'm. You. When that court case happened. First one. Do you remember what like what was the outcome? Did you won? What did the judge say? Anything that you remember specifically about that? Because you became quite well known for that. Yeah. And the lawyers representing you obviously fought very hard to get you acquitted of these charges of prostitution. Yeah. And there are obviously photos in the newspaper.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:26:32] Lawyer was a sex change to.

Daniel Browning: [00:26:35] So the lawyer defending you was also transgender?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:26:38] Yeah. That's Roberta. That. Uh. Uh, she. Yeah, that's Roberta. She's in New Zealand.

Daniel Browning: [00:26:54] From. From New Zealand. I see. But she's Pacquiao. And. And there's a photo of you coming out of the court. Got a smile on you wearing



sunglasses and got your handbag. And you're defended by someone who's transgender. So you reckon that helped the case?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:27:08] Yes. I reckon because she she really fought fought for it. And and I think the police knew she was a transgender, too, and but she knew what she was doing and she. She fought very hard.

Daniel Browning: [00:27:25] Did you ever I mean, you didn't expect to become an activist of any kind. It wasn't really your thing. You weren't. Although you come from a very highly politically active family.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:27:36] Yeah, my father was. He was pretty active.

Daniel Browning: [00:27:42] My McGinness is very much affiliated with the trade union movement.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:27:46] Yeah, my Uncle Joe, Joe McGinness, he fought for the workers union.

Daniel Browning: [00:27:55] And it was never something that you kind of aspired to do. You just kind of. That's how it ended.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:28:00] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I just did what I wanted to do.

Daniel Browning: [00:28:06] And so that second case where you're trying to prove we'll just have some secure some rights around your transgender identity and the other person in the case is trying to, well, being held in a men's prison. So were you ever held in a men's men's prison or arrested and ever in a situation where you were clearly endangered?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:28:34] Not really, because every time I did go to prison, they put us in a selected area where we gay people and transgender and. Child



molesters and all that together in one one area. So this wasn't really the first time I went into prison. I cried because I had to leave.

Daniel Browning: [00:28:58] You had to leave.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:28:59] You know, it was the end of my time because when I went in there, everybody just come. I was right. I had everything. They looked after me.

Daniel Browning: [00:29:12] In prison of inmates on the blackfellas.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:29:18] And one one part there I went in and one Aboriginal fella, he sort of was boyfriend. And. He was doing life or something for murder. And he looked after me. And then maybe after about six months later, he ended up killing himself, putting in prison. And that sort of because we became really close. Yes. And a lot of the trannies used to go back into prison to get their drugs.

Daniel Browning: [00:29:57] Because back in the day they were supplied with what, With methadone. Oh, really? What kind of drugs?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:30:05] Heroin. Marijuana. Speed.

Daniel Browning: [00:30:09] Illegally or legally. You weren't being handed this hand of the drugs out by the prison guards. There was just a lot of drugs in in jail.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:30:18] But I think it was the prison guards that were supplying it.

Daniel Browning: [00:30:22] Yeah, Unofficially. Yeah. So. But how many How many times did you go to jail?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:30:29] Probably about six times. And the longest would have been about. That three weeks.



Daniel Browning: [00:30:36] Hmm. And I follow that. You. You. Who took you for his. His. His partner. His boyfriend. Girlfriend, rather. Do you have fond memories of him or. Um. He just you kind of had to. He protected you from.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:30:55] From. Yeah. Yeah. Because I'm when you when they know you're training, going into jail.

Daniel Browning: [00:31:03] What happens?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:31:03] They usually write a little note if they want to go with you and they give you that note to tell you. Would you be my partner? And that that kind. And he did that to me.

Daniel Browning: [00:31:14] You got a love note?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:31:14] Yeah. And we all get them. All attorneys get on. If somebody wants to be your partner.

Daniel Browning: [00:31:23] And do you look on that relationship as kind of one of the loves of your life or. Not not.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:31:29] Really. Well, that's the first time I've been with the black man. And I think that I thought that would never happen, you know? But it didn't. And it was good while at last. But what? Made me really upset was after when when I found out after six months, you know. Hmm. Yeah.

Daniel Browning: [00:31:52] So the longest time you would have spent with him would have been three weeks. Because the longest spell you ever had in jail.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:31:57] Yeah. Yeah. So I was really happy when I. When I. Ended up getting him.

Daniel Browning: [00:32:05] Can I ask the time that you went when you first moved to Sydney is when we are starting. We're haunted by the specter of HIV and AIDS. And



back in that time, you know. A positive diagnosis generally was, I hate to say it, but a death sentence. And people were dying left, right and center and the party kind of was a little bit over. Yeah. What what was it like in that atmosphere.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:32:31] Coming back to Darwin after that ten years? And and I end up getting tested and I was positive. And that's 20 something years I've been positive.

Daniel Browning: [00:32:46] When you got that diagnosis because you would have liked me. Been around when you know, there was a lot of fear around HIV. And it was it could only end one way. That's what we were always told. How did how did you feel when you got your positive diagnosis?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:33:04] Well, I. I actually was in shock. And. Yeah, I was in shock and just thought, Well. I ended up doing what I wanted to do and I ended up getting this. So it's really nobody's fault but my own, you know? But I was shocked. To find out after I came back from Sydney that I had it. Hmm. Yeah.

Daniel Browning: [00:33:36] If back in the day, even if you're working the streets. Sexual health was probably not high on your list of concerns. Yeah.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:33:44] And I think I would have caught it through drug use because I was.

Daniel Browning: [00:33:49] Sharing equipment.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:33:49] And needles and all that kind.

Daniel Browning: [00:33:53] Hmm. And back in those days was did you was there ever. Did you clean them? Did you bleach them anything in between uses or you just it was just you had to get that hit.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:34:03] I just kept buying new ones.



Daniel Browning: [00:34:06] Or sharing.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:34:08] If I didn't have any, just share it. And a lot of a lot of my trendy friends end up dying. Using using. Dirty syringes.

Daniel Browning: [00:34:20] From. They didn't OD. They just caught something, though. They were. Was was it HIV and AIDS or other diseases they caught from from sharing equipment?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:34:31] Most of it was from HIV aids that they that they passed away. But it would have been about. Would have been about six tranny friends that died while I was still there working. And. That sort of snapped me out of it, too, because. How I got back to Darwin. I met a mate, a man. He'd come and seen me on the street. I end up having sex with him? Next month I was driving back to down with him. And hanging out at the same time. But he looked after me. And he ended up being my partner for about. But eight months.

Daniel Browning: [00:35:19] Is he from Darwin or.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:35:21] He lives at an empty two and he used to be a teacher at Batchelor College.

Daniel Browning: [00:35:29] Had you met him before?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:35:31] Yes, through friends. As Phyllis. And then. And then he ran into me in Sydney.

Daniel Browning: [00:35:42] Maybe he's looking for you.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:35:44] Might be. Yeah. Sean Ryan. He worked in one of the communities outside of Alice Springs for maybe 13 years, a schoolteacher. And then after he retired from the come to town and I met him. Well from Sydney and. Yeah.



Daniel Browning: [00:36:09] That trip that that trip home that he took you, was that when you pulled up stumps and you left Sydney for good?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:36:15] Yeah. Yeah. Even stopped using. Hanged out in the meantime, coming up to Darwin.

Daniel Browning: [00:36:23] So you were with withdrawing on this?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:36:26] Yeah. From heroin.

Daniel Browning: [00:36:28] How did you do you remember if you people get can get very ill. Did you did you get ill and.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:36:37] Not that ill, luckily enough to lay down and don't move that kind, but not going, ending up in hospital or anything like that.

Daniel Browning: [00:36:47] So at the end of that car journey. Car journey. Were you clean?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:36:51] Yeah. Yeah. I smoked the ganja.

Daniel Browning: [00:36:55] I been clean from heroin?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:36:57] Yeah, I was clean from heroin. And I went back to my aunt where I moved when I was a teenager, and she took me in. She even gave me a bed with my man.

Daniel Browning: [00:37:11] Wow. Can can I ask you about, like, just being your sense of acceptance and and whether you I know your parents didn't approve, but what about everyone else? Like, you know.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:37:22] Everybody, mostly everybody in town accepted me because I ended up living with different straight friends here and there all over town.



And that's why I really didn't care, because I had the support and care that I needed. So. I just lived on.

Daniel Browning: [00:37:44] I never. I even asked Gary this. Did you ever feel a sense? He says, I'm from Darwin now. I can never feel unsafe in Darwin. Did you ever feel unsafe at any time in your life? Even here in Darwin, where there is a support network where you know the streets and it's a small place.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:38:01] Yeah. The only thing I used to get scared of is when picking up strangers from the pub or things like that. That's. That's anything but I usually can tell if I'm going to get. Get any. They're going to get any trouble from them or anything.

Daniel Browning: [00:38:21] So. Can you sense it? I mean, it's it's just like a deep sense of awareness.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:38:25] What do you learn when you're working on the streets being a prostitute? You learn all of that. You know how to read people, body language, everything.

Daniel Browning: [00:38:36] We're still coming. It comes in handy. You need to be able to kind of sense get a sense of people real quick.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:38:42] Yeah, well, like here.

Daniel Browning: [00:38:44] In Big.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:38:44] W? Yeah, for thieves. I keep telling these. I said I used to be the best thief, and so I know every little movement and thing. That. I understand. And then now it's time to go back to Phyllis.

Daniel Browning: [00:39:05] Tell me about that when you're to be you presenting as Phillip. But tell me you've made a decision to go from Phyllis to Phillip.



Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:39:16] And you went back to Phillip to get that education and have a career. And I did. I ended up in health for 20 years.

Daniel Browning: [00:39:25] And in that. In that. In that career, you were always Phillip.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:39:28] Yeah, always. But everyone knew me as Phyllis.

Daniel Browning: [00:39:33] You presented to work as Phillip just for ease, I guess. And then but now, in this age, you've decided to go back. Tell me about what's going to happen because you will go back on hormones or you're back on the now.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:39:46] Minds at the moment. And then once I stop working, I'll just. Look after Phillips.

Daniel Browning: [00:39:53] What are the. Can you tell me? I've never known anyone who's been on on hormones. I've known people, but I haven't really asked them this question. What are what are the changes that you notice first when you're when you're on hormones.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:40:06] And the breasts start getting big and then your facial hair slow down in growth. Um, you end up getting a figure. Yeah. And the only time I stopped the whole month was when I was filling up.

Daniel Browning: [00:40:25] For a long time, though. Five, 15.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:40:27] 20 something years.

Daniel Browning: [00:40:29] And are you noticing from this now, this time taking hormones after almost 20 years, does it feel different or it.



Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:40:38] Just feels same, same day? No. I never, ever had problems with having hormones. And a lot of doctors say you're going to have. And things that will happen to you. But nothing.

Daniel Browning: [00:40:52] No depressive episodes, no mood swings.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:40:56] Nothing.

Daniel Browning: [00:40:58] Hmm. Are you looking forward to. To being Phyllis again?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:41:02] Oh, yes. Yes. I'm even going to change my name. Real in Deep Hole now, because Gary Lee gave me that pills. He changed it in Centrelink when he worked in Centrelink.

Daniel Browning: [00:41:13] He changed the records because he.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:41:15] Worked there, changed my name to Phyllis, and I got Centrelink under Phyllis.

Daniel Browning: [00:41:22] What difference did that make to your life being having to look at that? You've got to go to Centrelink, get your payments and being identified in Centrelink as Phyllis. Did that feel good?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:41:31] Yeah, yeah, I was really happy. There's. So this time I'll be changing around the table.

Daniel Browning: [00:41:41] So everything will be changed. When that court case happened in Sydney, was there any change? How did the law respond? Like did because it would mean that the other person in your case had a right to no longer be placed in a men's prison where their life would almost certainly be endangered, although it would definitely be suffered, suffer some kind of sexual attack. How did how did things change after that? Can you remember any any significant change?



Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:42:07] Um. I think because we were the first ever to do that. People started to sort of take notice and. My friend was happy because she wasn't going to a men's prison because whenever she went to prison, they'd send her to a men's prison and she was over joyful. To go to a female prison, you know.

Daniel Browning: [00:42:39] And primarily she feared what might.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:42:41] Happen from the men's prison because they just. They just used it. So wasn't any pleasure. In the jail. Hmm.

Daniel Browning: [00:42:56] And then. So you were always protected. If you were in prison, you're always in the protected protective wing with the child molesters and and and other other people who needed protection. So that was a good thing. At least at least you don't have I guess you didn't have that to worry about first.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:43:17] I remember the first time I went to jail. They picked me up on the street. And when they get when you go to jail, they've reversed the truck to the reception in Long Bay. And right next to the reception is the mine yard for the mine. The prisoners. Yeah.

Daniel Browning: [00:43:36] I can see you coming in.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:43:37] Yeah. So whenever that bus comes, reverses to that reception door, everybody just comes to the fence.

Daniel Browning: [00:43:44] So he's coming in.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:43:47] And to make it more worse, I had to be the last one to get out of the bus. Well, as soon as I seen that fishnet stockings that just screamed, Send her in there. I was crying. That take that sent me there. So that was the scary part that I had when I first went to jail. But after that, I did one week there. After that, I was crying to get out to. Didn't want to leave, you.



Daniel Browning: [00:44:16] Say, because you had everything. You needed their protection, you know? Yeah. So was it always mob who are. Who are looking after you in Long Beach? Yeah.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:44:26] Yeah. So it would have been the other guys or trannies that were doing longer times, you know.

Daniel Browning: [00:44:34] I know you and there would have been, as there is now, a high proportion of indigenous will mob in jail. Was that how it was when you when you were in jail There was always mob there.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:44:46] Yeah, there was always countrymen in, in jail. So. And one thing they always if there was a new person in the jail, they had just introduced themselves and become your friend or whatever.

Daniel Browning: [00:45:01] And they could identify you as a black fellow immediately. So if I had. If I were in a jail, I'd probably have to say we're uncomfortable with my mob was and or might take a little bit of time that.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:45:12] But anywhere you go in Australia, countrymen will always come. Where are you from? Like that. Say you automatically, you tell them and then you're right.

Daniel Browning: [00:45:22] Then the passport, you got the passport, that black passport, anything that you wanted to say. I mean, I know we're running out of time because you're on your lunch break, but anything that anything that you would like to say before we before I ask you one last question. Anything that you feel like I should have covered.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:45:42] I reckon all I'm up. Be what you want to be. And. And now it's more a little bit more safer, too, now that, you know, everyone knows what trainees do and transsexuals and that. So. Do what you want to do.



Daniel Browning: [00:46:04] And we're thinking about this question of pride. Sidney Well, pride, the word pride is used a lot. Could you just in the last few minutes that we've got, could I ask you just to think about how that what pride means to you? And how, you know, how it's kind of an essential part of life. Yeah. What? Maybe it means nothing to you. I don't know. Just. Just. Just reflect on that word Pride.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:46:29] Like I said, I always. I knew what I wanted. I lost my virginity at 12. That kind, you know? So I was looking for that kind of stuff. So I. Yeah. Just be pride in yourself and do what you want to do.

Daniel Browning: [00:46:50] Yeah, but anyone stop you or do you do you do you kind of think about pride in the course of your death mob?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:46:57] What? Without blackfellas, it's a different story because of family, because we all grew up. One family, you know, none of this or you that thought like that. And it wasn't like that. And and there's always one person that doesn't like it in the family. So you've just got to accept it and just try and get away from it whenever it happens.

Daniel Browning: [00:47:23] And and that acceptance, I think once we're accepted by our families, whoever it is, even if our parents don't accept us, we know we will find acceptance for who.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:47:32] We are and we don't need our family to accept us. Hmm. I always found her with other friends, too. You know, even though I knew my father didn't like it. And because of the religion and that. I always knew what I wanted and I went for it and I did it. And I'm still gay.

Daniel Browning: [00:47:55] Do you ever think you'll. What does retirement mean to you? And like, what do you how do you how would you like to spend the rest of your life?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:48:04] As Phyllis and. Just do my voluntary work and wherever I can get it.



Daniel Browning: [00:48:11] What kind of voluntary work?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:48:12] Whatever. Caring for people.

Daniel Browning: [00:48:14] Or want to just give back?

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:48:16] Yeah. Yeah. And I think by giving back, you learn more. And you get that. You get that feeling that you're needed and, you know. That's what I learnt from working. Mhm. Hurricane. That's it?

Daniel Browning: [00:48:37] Yeah. Well, you've been very generous in your lunchbreak. I'm really sorry that it had to be a rush job because you're such an important person. Yeah. Phyllis, thank you so much for making time for this.

Philip (Phyllis) McGinness: [00:48:49] Thank you for coming.

Daniel Browning: [00:48:51] Lovely to meet you.