

# Levinia Crooks

**ACON President 1988 - 1989, 1991 - 1992**

## **1) What impact did ACON have on the lives of GLBT people and people affected by HIV/AIDS during your time as president/CEO?**

When I was president there was very little engagement with women as service users (there are a very small number of positive women outside that observation but only one positive lesbian to my knowledge). In respect of gay men, HIV and ACON have a huge impact during my time. To some extent being in ACON meant identification with HIV. This was difficult. For the community ACON, and HIV supplanted much of the work that had been happening to progress GLBT issues. This meant that Madi Gras became focused on HIV. Mostly this also happened in Victoria where the idea of saving (by ALSO) for a gay retirement village got diverted to VAC and the idea of a gay credit card got shelved as well. In Sydney, gay rights activists and activities took up HIV and this became the priority for a number of years.

## **2) What were the greatest challenges that ACON had to face during your time as president/CEO?**

Death, and for a while a feeling there was going to be no positive outcome, just remedying one opportunistic infection so something more horrible could come along and if you survived the physical then dementia, PML or psychosis. Waste and a progression of people from being active contributive members of the communities to wasted and diminished people, and the difficulties of partners, peers and communities in dealing with this.

## **3) What were ACON's greatest achievements during your presidency?**

Making the shift from "in the absence of there being any treatment or cure for HIV, then everyone should assume they are positive and practice safe sex" through to "there are emerging treatments for OIs and HIV and as such we are now changing our position to one where people should test for HIV, monitor their health and make use of emerging treatments".

## **4) What was it like working at ACON during your time as president/CEO?**

Compelling, desperate, very rewarding, sometimes very hard and challenging, time consuming to the point of total absorption, occasionally overwhelming. It was also a time where I learned a huge amount and was encouraged to pursue my engagement in HIV.

## **5) What is your favourite 'ACON moment'?**

There are many. Standing at Taylor Square on the night of the first candle light vigil down Oxford Street and having a very large cop come up to me and say "I think you any your lot need to move out of here now." I turned to him and was about to bite and he said "because that's a big fucking cloud and you don't want to get rained on." It may not sound much, but the juxtaposition was great. Also waiting downstairs at the Shift to hear the outcome of the vote when I was first elected to the Board (1987) and just being so excited when I was.

