

Joan, born 1934

I lived a heterosexual life in what I believed was a heterosexual environment, all the time until I started University. In the US this was still called queer. I remember my mother talking to my sister about one of her friends. She's queer, she said. But I don't believe she and all the others really knew what it meant.

My first real contact with lesbians was with the feminist movement in Stockholm in the early 70's. Different groups came to visit us in the summer, American feminists wanting to establish contact with feminists in Sweden. And naturally, most of them were lesbians. Even if we didn't visit lesbian clubs, we saw them dancing with each other and our thoughts were My God, what a relief – you can actually do that!

But it all started gradually for me, I became more and more interested. And finally I wanted to join RFSL (The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights), but at that time it wasn't really possible to join without a recommendation. I had been there with a friend, a woman. I asked: How do they know...? "Well, they don't exactly ask who you are sleeping with, rather who you know." I knew a few women in the Norwegian women's lib and one of them said that I go with her. I was given some sort of paper that I could show and that's how I joined RFSL. There a lesbian group had just been started. It was called Cub Victoria, referring to Queen Victoria who believed there was no need for laws against lesbians since they did not exist...

I was a member of this group, but party life at that time was not anything for me. However, we did spend a lot of time at a restaurant called Piperska Muren. There were two dance floors, one more debauched than the other. This was the first place that Eva and I went out together, it must have been in the early 70's. Eva lived in my little collective for a while. We realised we were a proper couple the day we decided to always ring and say if we couldn't make it home for dinner instead of ringing and saying, shall we have dinner together?

I behaved very cowardly when I told my mum. I had been visiting her and on the way back to the airport she asked me if I was in a relationship with Eva. I replied yes and her reaction was: But maybe you will date men later on? Well, you never know, I replied... But she came to accept us quite quickly and we were welcome to visit her. But she never said what she really felt.

Well, nowadays hundreds of girls will show up for a lesbian party during the Pride Week in Stockholm, and I feel a little jealous, thinking they have had it easy. We still believe we paved the way for them.

Photo: Andreas Nilsson