

## ***Stig, born 1938***

As the years went by in school I started to realise, oh my God, I am not like the other boys. So I started to hang out with the girls instead, thus becoming teased by the boys.

There was this place called Centralbadet, a public bathhouse. At that time it was divided into a men's swimming section and a ladies swimming section. Once I went there with my brother and I saw all these naked men. As there were no women they were all naked. I thought it was fascinating! So I went there another time on my own. There was something that pulled me to this place. It certainly wasn't the swimming... No, I began to realise more and more that I was actually interested in this.

I must also mention how my mother brought up the subject, she used to ask: Are you interested in boys? And I replied No, of course not, how can you possibly think that? But at one point I felt: No, I can't do this anymore. So later when she asked again, I replied: Yes I am! After that she started looking into ways to see how this could be "corrected", as she thought this was an illness. And at that time it was officially classed as an illness. She suggested I should go see a psychiatrist for therapy, and I thought OK, I'll do that, it can't do any harm. And we had a great conversation. For the last session my mother was supposed to come as well, and he explained to her that she should be proud and happy to have such a safe and secure son. But she dismissed this, saying: No, he was young and a radical – no one to turn to. After some time she instead told me she had found a place in Poland

where there were some salt mines. If you spent time inside these salt mines you could probably regain the “genuine”... At which point I said: Mum – this is enough!

All this about the early struggle; I never joined pride marches or anything like it. I didn't dare as I knew that if it came out that I was gay, I would have been fired from my position as a teacher. The only time I joined marches was World Aids Day. Because my Peter was infected in 1984 and didn't pass away until 1992. There was no cure then, everybody knew that everybody would die.

On World Aids Day we gathered at Sergels Torg in Stockholm, and an outdoor candle was lit and placed on the steps at this large square for every person who had died. Year by year those steps became more and more crowded and finally it was just a sea of fire. I think this opened people's eyes, and made them realise how terrible a disease this was.

Photo: Andreas Nilsson