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Title

Randi Solberg Oral History Interview and Transcript

Date

May 2, 2008

Extant

1 hour 45 minutes interview (3 files) and 1 transcript

Abstract

In this oral history, Randi Solberg, a lesbian officer of the European Forum of LGBTQ+Christian Groups, discusses being a minister's wife in Germany, creating a pilot program to train LGBT human rights workers in Eastern Europe, and representing the Forum at the World Council of Churches General Assembly in Brazil in 2006.

Biographical

Randi Oklevik Solberg was born in September, 1963. She grew up by her loving parents in the town of Halden in southeast Norway, near the border with Sweden. Randi's childhood and adolescent years were intertwined with the Lutheran Church of Norway where she was active in Sunday School, Scouts, choirs and Christian students' groups. She was in a relationship for several years with a boy who also held to the traditional church values.

She received a Masters degree of Business and International Management from the Norwegian School of Management in Oslo in 1987. She began a career in business management in Oslo. She also took a break from the church at this time, finding it distant from day-to-day life – conservative and – a bit 'boring'.

Randi had a life-changing experience at age 29 when she fell in love with a woman for the first time. She recalls that this was like "seeing the light" – fragments of her life came together in new ways. It was "a liberation" that gave her an enormous amount of energy and joy. Her parents were initially shocked and distressed, but showed that "we love you no matter what." The fact that her parents were willing to go through a process of their own, changing their way of thinking about difficult life and faith questions, strengthened Randi in her image of God as

someone who loves me "no matter what." She learned about and joined the Open Church Group in Oslo which became a place of belonging and living out her faith in new ways. In 1996, the Open Church Group hosted the meeting of the European Forum of Lesbian and Gay Christian Groups in Oslo. Randi was a board member of the Open Church Group and chosen to represent the Open Church Group at the Forum's annual meeting. The Forum gathering had a profound impact upon Randi – she initiated a long-term involvement and leadership within the Forum and also met a lesbian pastor from Germany, who would from then on be her partner for 8-9 years. Her relationship with Kerstin Söderblom blossomed and they spent a year together in New York City in 1998-99.

In the meantime, Randi had decided to leave her career in business, because she wanted to live in a different way, and she had taken the journalist study in Stavanger in Norway 1996-98. When Kerstin received a pastorate at a congregation in Frankfurt am Main in Germany, Randi went to live with her as the minister's spouse from 1999 to 2003. During this time Randi worked as a freelance journalist and writer and doing research for different Norwegian organisations. She took up German as her daily language, and worked in Norwegian, English and German. Randi's writing was published in periodicals and journals in many countries.

Randi engaged in the German Christian lesbian network Labrystheia, and she continued in leadership with the European Forum serving as the Forum's co-president from 2004 to 2006. She was project manager for "Let Our Voices Be Heard! Christian Lesbians in Europe Telling Their Stories," an anthology of biographical stories and articles from 95 Christian lesbians from 26 European countries. Randi solicited and collected the stories, arranged appropriate translations, and edited the whole collection. The book was first published in English in June 2004. A new edition was published in 2008 and a German translation in 2009. The book's website is www.letourvoicesbeheard.com

While Forum co-president Randi was instrumental in the creation of a pilot program to train LGBT human rights workers in Eastern Europe. She became the Executive Director of this project (2005-2007) to identify and train Eastern European LGBT Christian leaders to combat homophobia in churches and in society, to work for LGBT rights in conjunction with European Union directives; and to report religiously-based hate crimes.

With her expertise in international LGBT rights, Randi served as one of the Forum's representatives to the World Council of Churches General Assembly in Brazil in 2006. She also engaged in lobbying the United Nations with other international LGBT leaders that year.

In the period from 2003 to 2007, Randi lived in Berlin, and then returned to Norway, where she now is living with her Norwegian partner Eli Ragna Tærum. Randi currently works at the Norwegian Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombudsman's Office.

Scope and Content

In this oral history, Randi Solberg, a member of the Open Church Group and project manager for the "Let Our Voices Be Heard! Christian Lesbians in Europe Telling Their Stories" anthology, discusses being a minister's wife in Germany, and creating a pilot program to train LGBT human rights workers in Eastern Europe, as well as lobbying for international LGBT rights.

This interview was conducted by Mark Bowman, the executive director of LGBT-RAN. He holds a Master of Divinity degree from Boston University School of Theology and has played a key

leadership role in establishing a number of religious ventures and programs.

Access

Open to all researchers.

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/randi-solberg>.

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Languages

Collection material is in English

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Tags

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Solberg, Randi