

## **SIX MINUTE MEMOIR**

**THEME:** QUEER LOVE STORIES

**DATE:** THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2019

Almost 20 years ago I was working in television broadcasting in Toronto and was a member of BIWOT – Bisexual Women of Toronto.

BIWOT's next "field trip" was the Pussy Palace. The Pussy Palace was a semi-annual women's bathhouse event. It was held at Club Toronto, a gay men's bathhouse in Toronto's queer village.

For the uninitiated a bathhouse is a space frequented by men who want to have sex with men. There might also be a pool, hot tub, steam room, sauna and other facilities on the premises, but the whole reason for being there is to have sex.

In preparation for this upcoming event I went to my then on and off again "boyfriend" for some advice. At the time I had still not had sex with a woman.

I asked him to give me some “pro-tips” on oral sex with women. I had been on the receiving end of his “mad skills” and felt it was only fair that he share his knowledge with a friend in need.

He told me to spell out the letters of the alphabet with my tongue. Which now in retrospect makes me wonder if every time he went down on me that inside his head he was saying A, B, C, D ...

I waited in line at Club Toronto early that evening with my fellow BIWOT peeps. I came prepared. Ticket in hand. Overnight bag. Cash. ID. Condoms. Lube. Sex Toys. While we waited in line we were each given a leaflet that let us know what do if the Police showed up and which sex acts were technically illegal.

Interesting side note. Illegal: Another person in the room if two people were having sex. So I guess threesomes were out at this event.

Canadian law ... you are such a kill joy. By the way this is still on the law books.

Since I got there early I was lucky enough to get a private room. My "room" was more like an unadorned stall to keep a barnyard animal in. It had a bunk with a mat on it along with a locker.

Us "newbies" were given a tour of the space by the organizers. I do remember a dark and labyrinthine area filled with glory holes where gay men could have super anonymous sex. Mind blown!

You were encouraged to write a number on your body with a marker. This helped to identify you so women could leave you "love notes" to let you know they wanted to hook up with you.

There was a dance room and various activity rooms where either kink workshops or sex games were happening.

When I told some of my gay boyfriends about my experience they were stunned.

YOU TALKED TO EACHOTHER!?!?!?

That is not how things go down when its just men. We silently sit in the sauna and wait for someone to make eye contact with us and grunt in our general direction. Then we have sex. Then we go back to the sauna, not talk and wait for another man to signal grunt to us again.

Hmmm ... next 6 minute memoir ... toxic masculinity ... also a thing in the gay community. But I digress.

I found the High Priestess Room. There was a sign up sheet. I had no idea what seeing the High Priestess would mean. I let her know that I had not had sex with a woman before and was a little nervous. She told me not to be nervous and kindly allowed me to spell the alphabet with my tongue.

I felt for a first timer I didn't do too bad since she did seem to sincerely appreciate my efforts. I'd like to hope she wasn't just putting on a show for the newbie so I'd feel good about myself.

There was another room where they would take sexy Polaroids of you. I still have those photos to this day.

There was a line up to get into the pleasure cave. Again. I had no idea what I was getting in to, but decided to just keep riding the sexual adventure wave. You had two options. You could watch or you could be blindfolded. I chose blindfolded. Let's just say that to this day the snap of latex gloves gives me a little quiver of excitement.

To say that I was somewhat over stimulated is an understatement.

I heard that there were lap dances going on somewhere.

I ran down bare bottomed in my short cotton dress to the front desk and loudly asked: "Where are the lap dances happening?" The front desk clerk didn't answer me. Then I notice some men behind her. I asked if they were pool repair men. She retorted "They are not pool repairmen. They are cops!"

I then slowly slinked backwards away from the cops to my room and locked myself inside. I could hear women whispering to each other that the cops were here. Lots of women were packing up and leaving. Some women decided to stay tell the cops to F Off. At one point a cop started pounding on the door of my room demanding that I let them know who was in there. Thankfully I had read my pamphlet while I was in line and knew that I did not have to open the door or let them in, so I let them keep on pounding until they eventually gave up and moved on. I wish I could have said I was one of the brave ones that night, but instead I stayed locked in my room for over 2 hours until I heard that the coast was clear.

In the days and months that followed, the queer community would take part in rallies, marches, demos and fundraisers to protest the illegal raid and trumped up charges against the event organizers.

It took years, but the charges were eventually. The Judge said the Police violated the charter rights of all those in attendance. Organizers later filed a class action lawsuit and an Ontario human rights complaint and won.

Sadly, the Pussy Palace as we knew it, no longer exists. And the gay men's bathhouse, Club Toronto, is now a swingers club for straight couples called Oasis Aqualounge, that occasionally has queer focused events.

Still there will never be an experience quite like my first time spelling the alphabet with my tongue at the Pussy Palace that was raided by the police.