

## Ruth's story

On that particular morning the worship at church seemed to go really well. I like it when Jim leads; he's a bit brusque when you speak to him, but somehow he has a personality transplant when he leads our worship times, playing with increasing sensitivity. And Doreen, one of our lovely old dears actually thanked me for my bass playing after the service. Never happened before, so that's a bit of a result. In fact, when I started playing in the band a deacon memorably expressed surprise that the bass was an odd instrument for a woman to be playing.

I've been going to Thornham Baptist for nearly a decade, since I came to uni. They're pretty friendly at Thornham, though it's only been this last year that I've made really good friends with a married couple, Dave and Jane, who arrived on the scene last year. You can tell them anything without feeling put down, and they're just fab at hospitality. Feel like I've known them forever.

I was hiding behind my bass amp by the drum kit waiting for the closing song when our Pastor, Mike Jones, took us all by surprise. Said we were planning on running a series of evenings on 'Hot Potato' ethical issues starting with the first on an appropriate Christian response to gay people. Then he added that he wanted gay people at our church to know that there would always be a place for them at Thornham and that they would be very welcome to come along to contribute to these nights. I peered out across the church to find our church secretary, Mr Strong, with a face that looked like he was about to combust. Mr Strong was old school. We'd had a debate a few years back on gender and leadership and he was barely recovering from that.

In coffee after the service I noticed the general murmur had a greater intensity to it. I also realised that polarised groups had formed, as they always did, when something controversial was afoot. I took refuge with Dave and Jane. Jane asked me about my week but Dave was more interested in whether I was going to pitch up for the 'Hot Potato'. I was pondering my response when I overheard Mr Strong say to his group next to us, something which sounded like, "We'll be letting paedophiles in next." Dave might have leapt on him if it hadn't been for Jane calming him down.

The walk back to my flat took about 20 minutes. "We'll be letting paedophiles in next" rang round my head. I thought back to the time when I realised I first had feelings for another woman. How, on my 13<sup>th</sup> birthday I felt both exhilarated and terribly guilty at the same time, to be sat next to Joanne at the cinema, and we brushed arms. How I went out with Gary from my home youth group when I was 15 but only kissed him because I knew I must. After all, I'd been putting it off long enough. How, in my first year at Uni, I started meeting a woman tutor who was married. I admitted to a friend that I might be gay, and somehow it got back to the Christian Union, and I denied it. All left me feeling confused, angry with God, and most of all, guilty. In my last year at uni, having lived fairly promiscuously (but secretly) for a few months, having sex with various partners, I went to New Wine with Christian friends, and not only recommitted my life to Christ but had some counselling about my sexuality. To be honest the counsel was a bit clumsy; it was just a relief to tell someone.

I unlocked the door of my flat and wandered into the kitchen. On the table was some unopened mail that I picked up. Three envelopes but only one worth opening; thought I recognised the slightly wobbly handwriting. It was a card from my Grandma, who's a real sweetie. This is what it said:

*My Dear Ruth,*

*It was so lovely of you to come and share in my birthday last month. And thank you so much for the flowers. How I love daffodils; Grandad did too when he was alive.*

*You've been much in my prayers recently, so I thought I'd write to tell you how I love you. At church today the sermon was about unconditional love. Not just the people you love but the not so nice ones too. The bit that got me was about people you really love making choices that you don't understand and that real love doesn't try and change them but loves them whatever. I'm old-fashioned and probably too old to change, but what I think I'm learning is that, even at 86, God wants me to love deeper than I've ever loved before. Just thought I'd write to tell you that.*

*Looking forward to seeing you in the summer.*

*All my love,*

*Grandma x*

*I wept.*

*[This story is true – names have been changed, for obvious reasons]*