

An Eastbourne man's experiences of being gay. From an undated newspaper report, c.1980s

CHE Group: Eastbourne

"Like a lot of gay people, I found it fairly easy to pass as a heterosexual. That way, I managed to miss the insults, the disapproval and the difficulties that openly gay men and women sometimes face. But I missed other things too. Like love, friendship and, maybe most importantly, my own self-respect. And when those are lost, the respect of society seems a pretty worthless thing. I got to the point where life itself seemed pretty worthless too.

Nevertheless, it still took me about two years to find the courage to go to my local CHE group. Half expecting to find a bunch of weirdos, I found instead a bunch of very ordinary, very nice people who soon became my closest friends. With their enormous support, I slowly but surely managed to come out to family and workmates — something which once seemed inconceivable. Now, I've formed a very special relationship and I'm happier than I've ever been in my life.

I owe two huge debts of gratitude. Firstly to my friends in my local CHE group. Secondly, to all those gays who fought so hard to change public opinion enough to make it easier for me to take the plunge. That's why I believe *every* gay man and woman must belong to CHE. Whether or not you get actively involved, your subscription alone helps to push things a little bit further. Because the bigger we are, the more notice gets taken of us. CHE's achievements have proved that again and again.

Passing for "straight" may seem like the easy option. I think it can be the most difficult thing in the world. In comparison "coming out", with the help of CHE, is a really joyous experience. I wouldn't have missed it."