



Jackie Forster (1926 – 1998) If power is about making a difference then Jackie Forster was a powerful woman. Thanks to her many thousands of women have been able to lead more dignified, less isolated lives. "If she had served any cause other than lesbian rights, she'd have been festooned with honours; she would have been Dame Jackie Forster," said writer and academic Gill Hanscombe. However Jackie received little official recognition despite a personality and talent that in the 1950s made her the darling of BBC producers and the public. Under her maiden name, Jackie Mackenzie, she became one of television's liveliest sparks, sharp and funny with a mercurial quickness. She pioneered live to camera reportage. Her account of the wedding of Prince Rainier and Princess Grace in Monaco in 1956 won the Prix d'Italia.

She was a conventional "very proper woman", born in 1926 to Scottish parents. She was educated at Wycombe Abbey, and St Leonard's in Fife. Early theatrical experience saw her touring the country and in the late 1940s she joined the Arts Theatre Club in London. The event that changed the course of her life occurred in 1957 - her first lesbian affair, although it would be 12 years, a marriage and divorce later, before she came out, announcing at Speaker's Corner: "You are looking at a roaring dyke." It had taken that time "to get rid of the feeling there is really something rather nasty and nobody else should know about it". Suddenly she thought, "How dare they?"

From her "conversion" to her death, she worked to make sure other women did not go through what she had. People were her passion. She could be hectoring; intimidating, even rude.

The magazine Sappho, which she co-founded in 1972, was Jackie's lasting monument. There were also monthly meetings where, at a time when lesbians were invisible to the world and each other, they could "unfurl" without fear.

She revelled in gay rights group Outrage's policy of direct action. But the desire to shock also stemmed from a sense of conviction, as with her campaign to help lesbians become mothers through artificial insemination by donor. Gill Hanscombe describes Forster "She has noble instincts ... to fight injustice of any kind, not just for lesbians."

London Weekend Television's 1974 access programme Speak for Yourself, the first made by lesbians and gays themselves, was the start of a swathe of programmes in which Forster spoke her mind and helped others find theirs.

In 1993 she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She recovered, to agitate on behalf of breast cancer awareness. After half a lifetime of political agitation, sitting on this committee, pioneering that magazine (she never gave up journalism), she created Daytime Dykes - a social gathering that visited historical buildings and museums. In the week before her death, she was working with talking papers for the blind.

Jacqueline Moir Mackenzie, broadcaster, editor and gay rights activist: born London 6 November 1926; married 1958 Peter Forster (marriage dissolved 1962); died London 10 October 1998.

Carole Woddis, theatre writer and Guardian journalist

**Sue Sanders, Chair Schools OUT UK, Professor Emeritus,
Harvey Milk Institute**

Faces of 2017: Jackie Forster



Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans
History Month