

"...a magnificent love story. See this film!" Dagen nyheter

"Zest for life, warmth and humor" Svenska dagbladet

"Tales with explosive power" Expressen

COMPANIONS – Tales from the Closet

A film by Cecilia Neant-Falk & Nina Bergström

"They didn't say homosexual in those days; they said pervert"

IN THIS FIRST Swedish film about lesbian love, five women 70-year old women tell their life long way from self loathing and forbidden love, to liberation and openness. In humorous and sensitive way, they talk about budding love and meetings with women, but also about secrecy and loneliness, living with their "companion" in the closet, or as "old maids". They all have had to question their own fear of being different, risking losing friends, relatives and colleagues for something that is important and beautiful for them, but sometimes ugly and strange for others.

Many things have happened since. In 1995, two women portrayed in the film were the first female couple to register partnership in Sweden... Portrayed in the film as also Kerstin, a minister in the Swedish Church.

Companions – Tales from the closet is a beautiful, humorous and moving documentary about liberation and daring choosing a life of one's own. The film is also a piece of contemporary Scandinavian history, a portrayal of a country in change.

Companions – Tales from the closet has received several awards, and has been highly acclaimed by the Swedish press, when screened at SVT2 (The Swedish National Public Television) and in theatrical distribution.

"An extraordinarily beautiful and moving documentary, Companions – Tales from the Closet introduces us to five Swedish lesbians, ages sixty-five to seventy-five, who candidly recount their lives and love from the 1930s onward. Telling stories of their isolation, self-loathing, secrecy, compromise, and eventually "coming out", the film traces how perceptions of lesbians have changed since the days when, as one interview puts it, "They didn't say homosexual, they said pervert".

Combining interviews with slice-of-life footage and archival materials, filmmakers Cecilia Neant-Falk and Nina Bergström evoke an unusually poetic sense of reflection and remembrance. Ultimately a film about liberation, Companions – Tales from the Closet is a thoughtful and uplifting celebration of lesbian life and love"

/Text in catalogue in the New Festival New York L&G Film Festival

DIRECTORS & SCREENWRITERS CECILIA NEANT-FALK & NINA BERGSTRÖM
PHOTOGRAPHY LISA HAGSTRAND & MIA TUROS

EDITOR BERIT LJUNGSTEDT

SOUND ZSA ZSA TIBBLIN ALC

PRODUCED BY ARTEMIS PRODUKTION & LITTLEBIG PRODUCTIONS WITH
SUPPORT FROM SVT 1 DOKUMENTÄR (swedish national public television) THE
SWEDISH FILM INSTITUTE, RFSL, FOLKHÄLSOINSTITUTET, LN!

GENRE DOCUMENTARY FORMAT FILM 35MM (1:1,33) & VIDEO SOUND DOLBY
SR RUNNING TIME 53 MIN.

COLOUR & BL/W LANGUAGE SWEDISH with ENGLISH SUBTITLES PRODUCED
IN SWEDEN 1996

DAGENS NYHETER/Daily News – 25 oktober 1996 after the theatrical film premiere
A film review in the largest nationwide swedish morning paper

”Images from the Closet”

Contemporary interviews in documentary about lesbian women.

”We’ve seen them abroad, especially in the United States, and almost to death; the coming-out-of-the-closet-films. Movies about accepting one’s homosexuality, surviving family and surroundings. But strange as it seems, there has not yet been a swedish film. In any case not about women. And definitely not about 70 year old women.

This is why *Companions – Tales from the Closet* already is an entirely unique film. From a swedish perspective, though archival footage and photographs, we get insights in the life of lesbian women for 50, 60 years ago. For example the first swedish lesbian club; ”Diana”, established in 1954.

It is the contemporary interviews with the five women in the film that is the film’s fundamental dramaturgi. Some of these women are portrayed in the black & white snaps from the past. Unique, and still representative fates appears: Kerstin a former schoolteacher, now since a long time ordained priest in the swedish church; Frieda born in Vienna, who grew up in the Sovjet Union and came to Sweden in the late 40’s; Elen, once a fulltime housewife with children; Abbe who grew up in a Christian FreeChurch fosterhome in the swedish countryside; and Boel who was brought up in an intellectual family near Stockholm.

There is a special presence in the film, mainly due to the fact that many of the women comes out and tells openly about their lives for the very first time.

And the stories they offer are sad, funny, haunting and hilarious; about being forced to living a double life, a hidden life, or no life at all. Especially moving is their straightforwardness, expressed with neither illusion nor sentimentality.

The women have that kind of integrity, as people often have, who, because of certain circumstances, has had to question themselves or fight for their identity. This is an integrity which, in a remarkable way, somewhat makes them more human than (we) other.

Skillfully Neant-Falk and Bergstrom bring out the women’s tales in filmic relief. The shooting locations are chosen with care. Abbe at her lonely blinking lighthouse, as one with the gray stones at the seashore, or Ellen in her living room vacuum cleaning her best carpet – a reminiscens from her housewife life – and the same carpet at which she, in the end of the film, dances with her lover.

And yes, structurally the film moves from darkness to light, even to a kind of ”happy end”, where the spectatos is invited to share newly found joy.

Companions – Tales from the closet is a film about the enormous, revolutionary powers that, altogether invisibly, may reside below the smoothest of surfaces, the quietest of women’s faces: a housewife’s professional smiling at the photographer.

It is a film telling about the ”in spite of it all”, the against all odds. It is, in the word’s proper sense, a love story – and as a love story it is a magnificent one.

See this film!”

Maaret Koskinen –

Film reviewer, professor in film at the University of Stockholm

FRIEDA was born in Vienna in 1924, but was brought up in the Soviet Union. As a young woman she was constantly falling in love with other women, but when she came to Sweden after the war, she tried hard to be as women should. Frieda ended up living a married family life for more than 30 years.

"I wasn't homosexual. No, I was just an odd sort, always falling in love with girls, or women. That was all"

KERSTIN was born in 1926 in Stockholm. She worked as a schoolteacher for almost 40 years, until 1981, when she changed career and was ordained priest in the Swedish Church. Almost all her life Kerstin has managed to keep her relationships with women secret from both friends and relatives.

"We belittle God when we think He forbids some people to love each other. Love closeness and understanding is something we all need, and you shrink as a human being if you don't have someone to love."

ELLEN was born in 1932 in Germany. She was brought up in a Danish fosterhome during the war. Ellen and her foster-sister, Ulla, fell in love with each other. Their relationship lasted for 40 years, even though Ellen had a child, got married and moved to Sweden.

"It wasn't love in my case. He didn't love me either, for that matter. What I wanted was to secure my child's future; economically."

BOEL was born in 1933 and brought up in an intellectual milieu in Stockholm. Early in life she married the man she loved. In the seventies Boel got involved with the women's movement. It was during that time she met women who lived a lesbian life.

"People are inclined to see us as cousins or sisters, instead of lovers. That is probably because women generally don't count as sexual beings, other than in relation to men."

ABBE was born in 1925 in the Swedish countryside and brought up in a strictly religious fosterhome. Abbe always knew she was different. Loneliness, longing and self-loathing was part of her everyday life for years, until she finally met other women who was "like that".

"Then they were going to have a meeting... Women like that, only. In one place! And I thought – Oh my God, how will that look like? What on earth have I gotten myself into!?"

Nina Bergström was born in 1962 in Sweden. Director and actor in theatre and film. Actor education at the Commedia school *Teater – verkstedet* in Oslo, Norway. She also composes music and draws storyboards.

Filmography: *Companions – Tales from the Closet* 1996

Cecilia Neant-Falk was born in 1971 in Sweden. Filmmaker and journalist.

Film education at *Ecole Supérieure de Réalisation Audiovisuelle* in Paris, France, and film studies at the University of Stockholm.

Filmography: Remordes Posthumes, 1993
Companions – Tales from the Closet 1996

FILM FESTIVALS

November 1997

- 13 Festival Internacional de Cine de mar del Plata – Argentina
- Verzaubert Film Festival in Berlin, Köln, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Munchen – Germany

Oktober 1997

- Vancouver International Film Festival – Canada
- Images et Nations – Montreal Lesbian & Gay Film Festival – Canada

July 1997

- 21 st san Francisco International L&G Film Festival – USA
- OUTFEST- Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Film Festival – USA

June 1997

- Seattle International Film Festival – USA
- New York Lesbian & Gay Film Festival – USA
- Boston Lesbian & Gay Film Festival – USA
- Skeive Filmer – Oslo Lesbian & Gay Film Festival – Norway

February 1997

- Gothenburg Film Festival – Sweden

TELEVISION

- Screened at the Swedish national Public Television (SVT) in May 1997.
More than 10% of the adult swedish population watched the film. (i.e 760 000)
- Sold at the Finnish National Public Television (YLE) in Octobre 1997

PRIZES AND AWARDS

OUTstanding Documentary Feature Award 1997

Award from the Grand Jury of OUTFEST Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Film Film Festival

The RFSU Award 1997

Award from RFSU; the National Swedish Organisation for Health and Sexual Education

Tupilak Culture Award 1997

Award from Tupilak; the Association for Scandinavian Homosexual Culture

The Pink Room Prize 1997

Award given by the Swedish National Lesbian & Gay Association

The Homosexual Rose of 1996

Award from Gothenburg Lesbian & Gay Association

LECTURES

- 13 Festival Internacional de Cine de Mar del Plata – Argentina
- The Museum of Work – Arbetets museum arr. LO – Norrköping, Sweden
- Columbia University & Barnard College – New York – USA
- University of Rhode Island – Kingston, USA
- University of Minnesota & Augsburg College – Minneapolis, USA
- Yearly Conference for American professors teaching Swedish, at University of Wisconsin – Madison, USA
- San Francisco International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival
- New York Lesbian & Gay Film Festival