
Remembering Joan Rivers, friend of the queer community

By [Erika Staron](#) September 4, 2014

Joan Rivers is arguably the mother of transgressive comedy. Decades before Sandra Bernhard, **Roseanne Barr**, **Kathy Griffin** or **Sarah Silverman**, Joan was one of the most successful comedians in the world talking about real life and telling uncensored jokes about her sex life. And while most notoriously vulgar and crude, she was a genuinely caring and sympathetic person. Everything I know about make-up I learned from her turn as Miss Piggy's coworker in *The Muppets Take Manhattan*, and I can remember listening to her Grammy award winning album *What Becomes a Semi-Legend Most?* and staying home to watch *The Joan Rivers Show* before I was old enough to understand what I was hearing.

Over the last week, while closely monitoring Joan Rivers' recovery, it became clear that Joan was one of those celebrities I expected to live forever. With a career that spans over 50 years, I am a part of a generation who can't remember a time without Joan Rivers. Unfortunately, [today is the day we figure out what life looks like without her outrageous opinions](#).

An outspoken ally who has openly supported gay rights, Joan was described by **Phyllis Diller** in **Yael Kohen's** *We Killed: The Rise of Women In American Comedy*: "If you want to be successful, you better stay with the gay-crowd. Joan Rivers, to this day, just tells you that right out."

One of her first times onstage was when she played a lesbian opposite a then-unknown **Barbara Streisand** in an off-Broadway play, *Driftwood*, in the late 1950s.

"The first play I did was in Greenwich Village in the early '60s. Barbra Streisand and I played lovers and we kissed," Rivers [once told *The National Post*](#). "This was before she was singing, before anything. I knew she was talented, but you never know what someone will be. She was a fabulous kisser, that's what I knew."

In Season 3 of *Joan & Melissa: Joan Knows Best?*, Joan revealed that she had recently kissed a woman. Explaining how the kiss happened on *The Today Show*, Joan said, "**Lily Tomlin**, who is my very good friend, she and **Jane Lynch** had a dinner party, and I met this lovely woman. At this point, all the men I go out with remind me of my father — dead ... I figured I might as well try it at this point. Maybe I've been missing something."



She went on to say, "I like her very much. It's like the **Katy Perry** song, 'I Kissed a Girl.' I don't know if I liked it or I didn't like it. I woke up this morning with an incredible urge to play golf."

When asked by *The Advocate* if she'd ever experimented with another woman for a 2010 interview, Joan responded by saying, "I always liked men. I wish I could say, 'Gee, there was this counselor ... ' But it never happened for me. Will it ever happen? Who knows? If Lily Tomlin had shown up with a ring, who knows what might've happened? But it would've had to be a big ring."

Aside from coining the catch phrase, "Who are you wearing?" the best and gayest thing Joan created is her webseries, *In Bed With Joan*. In June she conducted a hilarious interview with **Hannah Hart** from "My Drunk Kitchen."

In Bed With Joan - Episode 60: Hannah Hart



There'll never be anyone who can critique a dress quite like Joan, or insult a major celebrity without batting an eye, but at least we'll always be able to remember and appreciate her sense of humor. As she said in *We Killed*, "I wouldn't be here without the gay audience, absolutely wouldn't be here. They were the ones that laughed and encouraged and thought you were wonderful and therefore gave you the impetus to move on, and go, "Ohh, if they liked that, let me try this."

And try this she did.

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