

## The Only Way Through Is Out

**Suzette Mullen**

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In her candid, inspirational memoir *The Only Way Through Is Out*, Suzette Mullen traces the events leading to her midlife coming out—and her decision to leave her marriage, choosing “desire over safety.”

As an empty-nester, while composing a memoir with a writing coach, Mullen understood that she was in love with Reenie, her son’s kindergarten teacher and her best friend of almost twenty years. The physical attraction was longstanding. Although her romantic feelings were unrequited, Reenie was still the catalyst for Mullen awakening to her sexual identity and divorcing her husband.

There is a forthright feminist message here—not just about embracing one’s sexual identity, but about rejecting a subordinate role (Mullen had relinquished her corporate law career and left the driving and finances to her husband). And vignettes from the past interject evidence that Mullen’s same-sex desires went further back than she realized.

Early on, “THIS” is Mullen’s shorthand for the entire confusing situation. It would have been easier to pretend nothing had to change, she acknowledges: a therapist observed that one doesn’t have to act on being gay. But “the Voice”—which Reenie might have attributed to God—convinced Mullen to pursue authenticity. Coincidence guided her to a supportive community in a new state. Her family members were ambivalent, but she found encouragement from a Facebook group for late-life lesbians and public figures, including Glennon Doyle and Elizabeth Gilbert. A series of “Plagues”—including Trump, power outages, insomnia, and loneliness—exacerbated her stress and precipitated a mental health crisis.

The book ends on a perfect note as Mullen, at fifty-six years old, attends her first Pride festival. “It’s never too late” is the triumphant final line in *The Only Way Through Is Out*, an emotive memoir that issues a stirring call to women to choose self-actualization.

REBECCA FOSTER (January / February 2024)

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