

## CHAPTER IV

### TESTIMONIALS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LESBIANS

Collected by CIPAC/DDHH

VER CORRECCIONES

#### **Testimonial Number 1**

#### **Pseudonym: Kathia**

Kathia is 36 years old and single. She holds a position as a business administrator and lives in a residential neighborhood of the Costa Rican capital, San José. In the following testimonial, she relates events that occurred six years ago.

*"I feel that my civil rights were violated. I was in the middle of a heated argument with an ex-partner and she started throwing rocks at the windows of my house and shouting insults—all this in the middle of the night. She was threatening to kill me by burning down my house, after chaining the doors shut. I was so scared I called the police, because things were getting really serious. When I called, I didn't specify that this was a problem involving two lesbians—just that there was a domestic problem involving death threats. They told me they would send someone immediately... something like an hour went by and finally they showed up. When they saw that we were two women and that the dispute was a lesbian thing, they said they didn't want to get involved. I told them that she was destroying my property and threatening to kill me. They responded by laughing. They backed up the patrol car and sat on the hood of the car to watch..."*

*"I didn't file a complaint about this. I was really afraid and felt vulnerable because not even the police were willing to get involved when they saw what was going on. I have all of my female neighbors as witnesses, even the ones who wouldn't talk to me for something like a year, by the way."*

*"Months later, this ex-partner started harassing me by telephone, calling at all hours of the day and night. I filed a complaint with the city about harassing calls. The investigation was handled by the national phone company and it was determined that the calls were originating from her family's house. The city called her to warn her to stop making these calls. A few days later, she went to city hall and made a scene there. When I went to inquire about this case, the attorney who saw me told me that she didn't have any problem with those types of people, but she didn't like scandals either and, please, could I do something to resolve the matter..."*

*“The city added that the telephone was registered under her father’s name, and that since I had said it was a woman who was calling, they couldn’t do anything about it.*

*“What would my attitude be if this happened again? I would try to figure out how to solve the problem on my own. I don’t trust the law-enforcement authorities, and it would be an awful embarrassment to go through all that again.*

*“My family? At that time they didn’t know anything yet, but they found out about the scandal and a problem began with them as well. They were really supportive, but the scandal was an embarrassment for them in the neighborhood where we had always lived.*

*“The support of lesbian groups? Back then I didn’t even know that any existed in Costa Rica. I don’t think they help much, if you don’t go to gay bars or places, you don’t find out about their activities, workshops or events. Actually, I think that right now there are only one or two that are active.*

*“I wouldn’t go to the government to ask for help, and I think that to go to a human-rights organization you have to be prepared for them to invade your life. I’m concerned about my privacy, I don’t want to show up on the front page of the newspapers... I need to keep my job.”*

## **Testimonial Number 2**

### **Pseudonym: Tatiana**

Tatiana lives in a lower middle-class, residential neighborhood of San José. She is 26, single and unemployed. The events she recounts took place a year and a half ago.

*“I feel that my workplace rights got screwed, because at my last job, at an assembly plant, they fired me for being a dyke.*

*“The problem was that my supervisor, a 40-or-so Nicaraguan creep, took a liking to me. He would sweet-talk me and suck up to me a lot, but when he wanted to lay his hands on me, I told him he was out of line. I lied and told him that I didn’t want to get involved with him, that I had a boyfriend, and that we’d been together for almost two years. He got really angry, but he left me in peace for a couple of weeks.*

*“Then one day, during lunch break, we ran into one another alone in a corridor. He cornered me and told me under his breath that I was a big,*

*fat, lying dyke, that he had asked my female friends and they'd told him that what I'd had for nearly two years was a girlfriend. He was furious, and started pawing me all over while muttering that what I needed was a Nicaraguan he-man to do me.*

*"I was so scared that I pushed him with all my might and took off running. And that's when I really blew it: I left the premises of the plant.*

*"When I returned the next day, my female friends told me that they were waiting for me upstairs—in the boss's office. I went up, and she told me that I was dismissed for having abandoned my work. I tried to explain to her why, but she got even angrier with me and told me that, in any case, she didn't want any dykes working there.*

*"Of course I didn't make a complaint, are you kidding? First of all, I couldn't prove anything. And since I hadn't been working there very long, I didn't lose much. Also, I would die of shame if my mom found out.*

*"I think that my family suspects it, but they could kill me if they found out that I have a girlfriend and that was why I lost a job.*

*"I don't believe in groups and that stuff. I prefer to be with my girl, secretly, and to enjoy what we can. Since I don't believe in groups, I don't believe in the law either. I've heard terrible stories about abusive cops. I know that the law can be twisted, and I'm pretty darn sure that it's not going to be twisted in favor of a lesbian."*

### **Testimonial Number 3**

#### **Pseudonym: Carmen**

Carmen is a 27-year-old industrial worker. She describes a situation in which her rights as a worker were abused.

*"I worked at that factory for six months. I started working there after I was recommended by a lesbian friend who worked there too. After a short while I realized that there were several lesbians—maybe there were ten or twelve of us. At first I kept my distance, since I didn't want to give myself away. You know, when you're new... But then, little by little, I started sitting with them during lunchtime, and during breaks. Later on, we would even go out to the bar together. Of course, the group stood out. Everybody knew, and even though people said things to us, the bosses never said anything... That is, until one of the group had problems with her partner, who worked at the same place. Everyone became aware of the problem because they had a fight at the factory. Some of the employees*

*complained to the boss. In the end, he decided to fire all the lesbians who worked there. At first we considered filing an official complaint, but they said none of us would win, since the company assumed liability for unemployment insurance when they fired us. Others said that they didn't want to be outed by filing a complaint. In the end, we all ended up unemployed, and since that factory was in an industrial area, we were unable to get work in any of the factories around there. Now I'm more careful where I work. I hope that nobody finds out that they fired me for being a lesbian, especially not at home. Who knows what they'll think I did?"*

#### **Testimonial Number 4**

##### **Pseudonym: Cindy**

Cindy is a 30-year-old administrative assistant who lives in the province of Alajuela. She offers us another example of discrimination on the job.

*"This happened about a year ago. I got a job in San José, at a law office. There were a number of lawyers in the building, and about five of us secretaries. One day, the boss got the idea that it would be good for all of us to wear a uniform. This didn't seem like such a bad thing to me: the bosses would pay for half the cost of the uniforms and we'd pay the other half, in installments. The next week a tailor came to take measurements. I told her that, personally, I preferred pants. She told me that the boss had said that all the uniforms would be either skirts or miniskirts, and that I would need to talk to the boss to get authorization. When I went to see the boss, he told me No, because he wanted 'real women,' and as it was he already knew I was a lesbian—that this was a respectable place, that I didn't fit in with his staff, and that I'd be better off gone. I never expected him to know... I never expected him to tell me. I got really frightened, he scared me, and I immediately left. I didn't even go back to get my last paycheck. I don't feel safe reporting something like that, at least not for now. Especially with a group of lawyers, I know that I'll lose."*

#### **Testimonial Number 5**

##### **Pseudonym: Luz Marina**

Luz, age 37, has no formal education. She was discriminated against by her family, who lived in a rural area in the province of Alajuela, to the point that they put her under "house arrest."

*“When I was about 20 years old, I started going out with this girl. Everyone in town knew that she was a lesbian. But I was totally in love and I didn’t care about what anybody said. We went out for something like three months together until they realized at home. I had a ton of problems at home. This one day, one of my brothers followed me to our meeting place and screamed a bunch of stuff at her and me, and he literally dragged me home by the hair. When he got home he told my parents everything. From then on, they didn’t let me go out on the patio, or answer phone calls, or do anything. The first time I was able to go out after all that was to go get coffee. Later they let me go out with one of my brothers to the grocer’s or the store.*

*“I would go in, and he would wait outside making sure that I didn’t escape. Obviously, my relationship came to an end. Even now, things haven’t changed much: my father died three years ago and my brothers are married now and don’t live with us anymore. My mom is suffering a lot. She is very old, and it’s up to me to take care of her. I can’t leave her by herself. So, even though I could leave, I have nowhere to go. I can’t go to San José because it’s really far away. I can’t leave my mom alone for very long. Plus, who would I leave with?*

*“I didn’t file a formal complaint, and it’s still not worth the trouble. At the time I felt ashamed and afraid, and I thought that they had the right to do anything to me.”*

## **Testimonial Number 6**

### **Pseudonym: Xinia**

Xinia is a 23-year-old student who was discriminated against at school.

*“I am majoring in systems engineering. I’ve always considered myself a very independent girl. As soon as I turned 20, I told my mom what I was, and at that point I went to live with my partner. I had to work and study at the same time to get ahead. Sometimes it seems like people aren’t so prejudiced—I even told my classmates that I’m a lesbian. It all started when they started asking me who was the girl who was picking me up after class. I didn’t think twice about telling them that she was my partner. After that, everybody kept their distance from me. They didn’t greet me warmly like before. They hardly spoke to me, just the bare minimum. I’m sure that even the professors know. I felt that they were acting strange towards me—more strict and more serious. I’m hearing more anti-gay jokes than I did before. When I arrive, all I hear is laughter and whispering. My partner tells me I should change schools, but I don’t want to give them*

*the satisfaction, even though sometimes I'm tired of being in this situation. For now I'm just thinking about it. Maybe next year...*

*"File a complaint? With whom? With everybody! I stand to lose a lot more than I could ever gain... and what could I gain anyway?"*

### **Testimonial Number 7**

#### **Pseudonym: Azul**

Azul, age 30, lives in San José and is a teacher. She has experienced discrimination in the workplace.

*"I am a high-school math teacher. It's no secret that there is a lot of homophobia in schools. You really have to be careful, otherwise you might lose your job. Some of my colleagues know that I'm a lesbian, and therefore some students and their parents know as well. Even though I've been tempted to ask to be transferred, I'm worried about where they would transfer me. I've been working in the same high school for five years and I've had tenure there for three years. My biggest problem has been my colleagues. Even the principal of the school has been singling me out. They don't include me in activities, and they don't even invite me to any teachers' parties. I've had to realize that this is just my workplace. I go to work, I give classes, and I go home. On breaks, I choose not to go to the teachers' lounge. Because as soon as I come in, the room falls silent. Sometimes it's really hard for me to work under these conditions. I have to watch what I say and what I do, because anything can be used as a pretext against me by the school or the students' parents.*

*"Some time ago, a complaint filed by a teacher became public. I think it was in a private school. I heard it turned out really badly. I don't want to have to go through the same thing, and that's why I don't think I'll file a complaint. Keeping quiet at least keeps me my job."*

### **Testimonial Number 8**

#### **Pseudonym: Pani**

Pani is a 22 year-old college student. She recounts how her right to appropriate health care was compromised.

*"It all happened almost a year ago. I had my first lesbian relationship at 16, and didn't have any trouble. People my age are expected to have a*

*student's rebellious attitude. Nobody suspected anything, and because I told my parents that I was studying, I had a lot of leeway.*

*"The last two periods I had were very heavy, so much so that my partner recommended that I go see a gynecologist that she'd heard good things about from her family. I didn't like the idea much, but by the third period I was convinced.*

*"The appointment was made and, when the day came, I started wondering if they would realize that I was a lesbian, and, if they didn't, how I would tell the doctor that I was? And did it matter?*

*"My partner is six years older than I am, and she said, Yes, it was important that I tell her—that she was a woman and that she wouldn't make a big deal out of it.*

*"I went in shaking. The doctor was very nice when she started asking me questions, but when she asked me about my sex life and I gave her the lowdown, her attitude changed, and so did the way she treated me. She got short with me, and when she examined me it was as though lesbianism were contagious and she pulled her hand away.*

*"Then she told me that nothing was wrong—that these disorders were normal, especially when you have abnormal sexual relations, and that I should take some contraceptives, and that was it.*

*"I left feeling like a leper must have felt 400 years ago. I cried all the way to my partner's house. She was really scared when she saw me, because she thought that I had run into somebody who knew all about us.*

*"We got really angry, but we didn't do much about it. Then I was given the name of a gynecologist familiar with such issues, and I was treated decently there. I didn't file a complaint against the other witch because it would have been pointless. Fortunately, nothing was wrong with me, but I have to wonder how many women like me can get by if they have something serious."*

## **Testimony Number 9**

### **Pseudonym: Laura**

Laura is a 31-year-old accountant who lives in San José. Her civil rights were violated by the police.

*"This happened four years ago. I went out dancing with my partner at [...]. We got there around 9 p.m. and we left there at about 12:30. Since we couldn't find a taxi, we had to walk a few blocks. We had walked about three blocks when a cop car pulled over next to us. The cops got out and asked us what we were doing there at that hour. Because it was a red light district, they accused us of being prostitutes and threatened to take us to jail. They ordered us to get into the car. My partner and I were terrified, because we had heard about problems with the police.*

*"Once we were in the patrol car, they started driving around aimlessly while telling us that we were in serious trouble, and that we might spend a lot of time locked up. They told us stories about how, before being sent to jail, women are raped while being held in custody. I started to cry. My partner was at least as frightened as I was, if not more, but she was able to speak: She offered them all of her money if they would let us go right then and there. Within five minutes they had done what they wanted with us and had left us at a corner.*

*"We want to leave this incident behind us. We're neither pursuing it nor asking anyone else to. It is very difficult to prove anything, and even more difficult to win. We neither trust the police nor the law. Nowadays we only go out with friends who have a car, or if we can get a cab right in front of the club."*

## **Testimonial Number 10**

### **Pseudonym: Lola**

Lola is a 43-year-old taxi driver who lives in Heredia. She tells us of how she has been discriminated against by her clientele.

*"I've been driving a cab for about two years, and I've had nothing but problems. Lots of men harass and insult me—they call me a dyke and a bad driver. I am not a bad driver, and I always try to dress well and look nice. I don't like people saying things like that to me, but I have to work, and I like my job.*

*"Also, some women are really suspicious of me. They look me over from head to toe and some of them have even refused to get in the cab because I'm a woman.*

*"I feel like I'm rejected more than my colleagues because of my appearance. In this business, all us women get discriminated against, because everyone says that women are bad drivers. But lesbians are rejected for two reasons: for being women and also for being lesbians.*



*“My heterosexual female colleagues have a little bit more support from our male colleagues, but those of us who are lesbians must manage on our own.*

*“What kind of action can I take? We get ostracized, everybody knows it, and nobody does anything about it.*

*“My partner is an accountant and she also has problems at work. I think it’s something we just have to live with. That’s the way it is—you get used to it and you put up a protective wall. I don’t care anymore, and it no longer hurts me: Let them say what they will.”*