The first time I met Eric Rofes was over coffee at the Oscar Wilde Bookstore on Christopher Street. At some point, I communicated the point that I was a lot more on the heterosexual (het) side of the continuum: “queer in the streets, straight in the sheets,” as they used to say. Rofes laughed, suggesting he had seen more and more of his students, many of them straight lefties such as me, embracing a blurry, lusty queer politics, less invested in identity than caring and social justice. He said this was really what the future was about—a space where people really did not care or need to define or categorize their desires. And this was a good thing. In the years before Rofes died, we supported each other’s projects and books, met at conferences, and corresponded constantly. He even offered feedback for a draft of the essay that eventually became this chapter years after he first suggested that I write it in 1998.

Delinked from identity, such friendships help expand approaches to living, thinking, and activism (Roach, 2012). It is a way of imagining new, alternate kinship networks as well as models of community and pleasure. Such experiments are often born of a search for more authentic approaches to being alive that take shape through escapades within a city of friends. Growing up, these engagements helped point to a more authentic, intriguing way of being.

At least that was the feeling in the summer of 1986 in Dallas. That was the sense one got looking at the Christmas lights at Daddy’s, a tacky bar in the city’s gay ghetto. A song by Book of Love was playing on the radio:

I wanna be where the boys are but I’m not allowed
On the other side of the boys bar I want them to all come out
But it’s not my fault that I’m not a boy
It’s not my fault, I don’t have those toys
I’m not a boy

Some of my favorite memories of the period took place while hanging out at Daddy’s and dancing. Although ecstasy had been rendered illegal since “Black Monday” the previous July of 1985, Daddy’s still offered a generic alternative, “Eve,” over the counter at the bar in a shiny, fluorescent blue box (Pierce, 1985). The legions pouring into this corner of Dallas’s public sexual culture for their little pills would find a spirit of fun and kink, margaritas and lust, bulging pupils and knowing glances, which made the trip unique. On one occasion, I ran in still wearing a prom tuxedo as my friends waited double-parked outside. A laid-back African American gentleman wearing black sunglasses walked up, said hello, put his arm around my waist and gave me a little pinch—a gentle pinch—but it suggested there was more where that came from if I were interested. I did not really know, but it still gives me a pause. Those experiences in queer spaces completely altered my “straight” view of the world. Writer Amber Hollibaugh (Gomez, Hollibaugh, and Rubin, 1998) describes a similar experience with leather bars: “That was where I first learned that you didn’t have to be the person sitting next to you. You could be fascinated by it but it wasn’t a threat to your own sexual desires” (p. 113). Throughout high school, from 1984–88, teams of my friends and I all flocked to the Starck Club, Daddy’s, The Walk, JR’s, and the other venues within Dallas’s thriving queer ghetto to take part (Kelly, 2014; Alexandre, 2009).

Over time, what started as a curiosity opened a new democracy of pleasure and politics for me. These queer spaces offered new forms of comradery, legions of friends, and urban vistas. When heterosexual class hierarchies offered little but stuffiness and exclusion, these spaces opened doors for alternate ways of living. They showed me more about community building than anything I had known. Rather than cliques, here the citizenry built community through pleasure and shared engagements in living and fighting for a better world, just as Aristotle suggested good friends do.

As a het, I did not see a point in trying to pass as queer, yet I often did, sometimes to my advantage, sometimes in powerlessness. Through grade school, I played the cello in the string quartet, and accusations of sissydom followed. In Texas, you were either a ball player or queer. There wasn’t much room for nuance. My resentment (and insecurity) led me to conform, do high school “butch masculine,” and play football. Even there, towels snapped, boys were boys, and a Spartan level of queer desire/repulsion allowed for still more ball and bonding. Sometimes bonding occurred through the constant flow of antiquer jokes; at other times it was through quasi-homoerotic rituals of passage. The guys at a rival school were known to have shoved Oscar Mayer wiener’s up their bums before they did sprints up and down the football field. A couple of the guys on our team had even taken the talk of jock straps, and so on, into play off the field. My friend