



**Sandi Toksvig**

**Sandi Toksvig** has many strings to her bow — The Great British Bake Off, BBC quiz show *QI*, Channel 4's *Fifteen to One*, *Whose Line Is It Anyway*, or *Have I Got News For You*.

But, as well as being a prolific comic and TV host, Toksvig has found time to be a truly inspirational campaigner for women's rights and LGBTQI rights around the world, and all-round great person.



The Danish-British comedian lived in Africa and the United States as a child, as her family moved about a great deal for Toksvig's father's work as a radio broadcaster.

It was at Cambridge University, from which she graduated with a first in law, archaeology, and anthropology, that she first started out in comedy with the renowned Cambridge Footlights Society — alongside Stephen Fry, Hugh Laurie, Tony Slattery, and Emma Thompson.



*Shown here with Hilary Duguid, Emma Thompson and Jan Ravens in the first all-female Cambridge Footlights show, Woman's Hour, in 1980*

Whilst studying at Cambridge, she was almost thrown out of her university college upon finding out she was having a relationship with a woman.

‘When I was in Cambridge there was no LGBTI society,’ she said. ‘They only allowed me to stay because of my excellent academic record,’ she continued. ‘So if you’re gonna be gay, be smart about it.’

But when she first came out in September 1994 and became, in her own words, ‘the only out lesbian in British public life,’ Toksvig was told that her career was finished. She received death threats, and was forced into hiding by the public outrage at her sexuality.

‘I was unaware of another lesbian in British public life...people wanted to kill me, I had to have police protection,’ she recalled.

In 2014, having refused to be cowed by the haters, Toksvig celebrated her marriage to Debbie Tokvsig. And in 2015, she decided it was “not too late to fight the good fight, after all,” and co-founded the Women’s Equality Party.



Somewhere among all that, she found time to write more than 20 books, including fiction, non-fiction, children’s books, and books for adults.

## Women's Equality Party

The Women's Equality Party is a feminist political party set up in the United Kingdom in 2015. The idea was conceived by Catherine Mayer and **Sandi Toksvig** at the Women of the World Festival, when they concluded that there was a need for a party to campaign for gender equality to the benefit of all. The launch meeting was on 28 March 2015 under the title "The Women's Equality Party needs you. But probably not as much as you need the Women's Equality Party". The party's full policy was launched by its then-leader Sophie Walker at Conway Hall on 20 October 2015. In January 2020, Mandu Reid took over as party leader.

Journalist Catherine Mayer, having watched the panellists agreeing collegially with each other on almost every point, stood up and said, "What about if I found a Women's Equality Party, tell you what, I'm going to go to the bar afterwards, anyone interested in discussing this come and see me."

At the same festival, comedian Sandi Toksvig presented an event entitled "Sandi Toksvig's Mirth Control: Stand Up and Be Counted". Interviewed by Jenni Murray on BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour, Toksvig said: "I had a fantasy cabinet of women, and I didn't care which party they came from, we had Doreen Lawrence as our Home Secretary. Can you imagine anything more wonderful? We had Paralympian Tanni Grey-Thompson as our Sports Minister, and I asked them to put forward practical suggestions. The world is in a parlous state, 9.1 million women failed to vote in the last election, we need to attract them, and we also need to attract the more than 7 million men who didn't vote. Why are people not engaged in politics, because I don't think that the people standing represent the diversity of this country?" Mayer heard this, phoned Toksvig, and the two agreed to become co-founders of the party.



## Women's Equality Party Goals

- Equal representation in politics and business;
- Equal representation in education;
- Equal pay;
- Equal treatment of women by and in the media;
- Equal parenting rights;
- An end to violence against women.

— *Women's Equality Party, six stated goals of the party*

After the first party conference in November 2016, a new goal was added:

- Equality in healthcare and medical research.

— *Women's Equality Party, additional goal of the party.*

The party has not been successful so far.

A photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and red, with some clouds. The water is dark with some lighter patches reflecting the sunset. The quote is centered over the image.

**You have to stand for the things  
that you believe in. You have to  
stay strong inside.**

Sandi Toksvig