

~~June~~
~~May~~ 2016

The OLOHP Insider

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

Issue 31



Arden's Musings

I've always loved milestones – the anticipation as one gets near, and the satisfaction when it arrives. In late 2006, I began tracking things closely. The Project was nearing the milestone of having conducted 100 interviews. I plotted and planned so that I could do that one, interview 100, with Scottie Scott, a Houston woman I've known for over 50 years. I interviewed her in April 2007, almost nine years to the day after the first interview. That was with Marie Mariano in April of 1998. Reaching 100 felt like a huge accomplishment, which it really was.

Fast forward to April 2016 – I can hardly believe it myself, but we have now conducted 500 interviews. I would never have dreamed that we could do this. It's a bit overwhelming, especially when I do the math and realize that while it took nine years to do the first 100, the Project did 400 more in the next nine years. Wow.

Margaret has promised to update the maps we have used, showing where the 500 women lived when they were interviewed, and all the trips we've taken by car, motor home, and planes over the years, but I'm letting her put that off for a while – not surprisingly, she says she's pretty busy right now with all the interviews that are still in process! I guess that's a good excuse for delaying the maps!

Reaching such an important milestone has been interesting in several ways. One unexpected result has been that it's prompted a lot of thinking about where the Project goes from here. The OLOHP Board has been talking about it, and we're planning to get input from all the interviewers, transcribers and volunteers this summer. Around 20 of us will all gather in Madison, Wisconsin in a few weeks and lots of brainstorming is on the agenda.

In addition to the National Women's Music Festival in Madison, we'll be training some new interviewers, meeting with the 20 or so who have been involved for quite a while, and doing two workshops. One will be an interactive workshop with women from the audience serving as readers, giving voice to a selection of excerpts from the Herstory collection. The other is a showing of *Our Stories, Our Voices: The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project*, the DVD that you can read more about on page three of this *Insider*.

And last, but not least, I hope you'll all go visit the fresh, new website we have at www.olohp.org, and send us your feedback. (Read about the new website on the next page.) We've been busily hatching plans on more content that we want to add to the site, and would love your ideas as well.

Arden

Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older

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Change Can Be A Good Thing...

To start with, our May issue morphed into a June issue. Instead of the usual four pages, you'll notice this issue is five. We couldn't restrain ourselves! There was too much we wanted to share. Instead of pictures of different women on the front page, those are all Arden. And instead of having excerpts gathered together at the end of the newsletter, they are spread throughout. The end result is an *Insider* that isn't as neatly compartmentalized as we – well, as Margaret – likes. But sometimes change is a good thing....

Can We Build It? Yes, We Can! Can We Fix It? Yes, We Can!

Even if you don't recognize the title of this article as coming from the theme song of Bob the Builder, a children's TV show, or as something we all heard Barack Obama say repeatedly while campaigning, we love the sentiment. In fact, it was our own mantra in building a brand new website for the Project.

Sharing a quick history of our website, Mary Henry built and maintained a great one for us years back. But as we all know, anything to do with computers, or the Internet, is obsolete practically before it even exists... what you can do nowadays is truly amazing. Wanting more bells and whistles was part of our motivation to do a new site, but also, we wanted it to be more usable on diverse devices (cell phones and tablets) and to move it into a platform that was easier to maintain. So we salvaged what we could from the old site and built a new one from the bottom up.

As expected, you can find us at www.olohp.org. Once you're there, be sure to click on all the links, try out all the items under the menu bar and generally put it through its paces. We are excited to once again have some audio samples available on the website. In addition to lots of info about the Project in general and its history, there are dozens of excerpts from the Herstories, and lots of photos.



Want to listen to a few samples from interviews? Click here!

If you run into something that doesn't work the way you expected it to, let us know. As Arden mentioned, we have a couple of ideas for new content we plan to add later this summer, but we'd love to hear your ideas, too. We're also looking to enlist at least one more person to help maintain the website.

Don't actually click here... go to www.olohp.org, find this graphic, and click there!

A note from Margaret...

One of the things I like best about working with the OLOHP is that I learn something exciting almost every time I take on a task – review a transcript, work on a presentation, design a website, repair a damaged photo, work on *The Insider*, and more. I'll freely admit there are times I drag my feet, putting off whatever needs to be done until I finally give in, mumbling and grumbling my way through these learning experiences. But once they're behind me, I really do appreciate what that specific task has given to me. In the case of our much needed upgrade for www.olohp.org, working on it not only taught me a lot about designing, and implementing that design, but it truly was fun and empowering. I won't go as far as saying I want to do another site anytime soon, but it was fascinating, challenging, and rewarding.

Excerpts in this issue are all from amazing women who have recently died – they will be missed.

An Excerpt from the Herstory of Kiki Santikos...

My gay life started, actually, in my senior year. Realizing that I was attracted to this girl. And to my P.E. teacher. But I never acted out on it. And I didn't act out on it when we moved to Houston.

I went to work at an insurance company and befriended this woman who was widowed early with two children. She was by no means gay. But I befriended her, and through her I met two gay women who were lovers at the time. They took me under their wing and started introducing me to the community here.

The timing of my coming out and my doing things – you didn't go anywhere without a male escort. So I befriended this male teacher who was gay. We agreed to get married just for show.



Kiki Santikos
Houston, Texas
Born 1935, died 2016
Interviewed in 2010

Fourteen Months? That's One Long Gestation!

Fourteen long, long months: That's how long it took for *Our Stories, Our Voices: The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project* to go from a twinkle in the eye of Kathy Prezbindowski, who suggested the idea of creating a DVD focusing on dramatic readings we've been doing, to giving birth to a couple of boxes filled with DVDs, ready and waiting to be shared.

Like all good ideas, it started with a bunch of us saying, "Great suggestion! Let's do it." Before long, reality set in and most everyone involved was saying, "What did we get ourselves into?" But now that the labor pains and birthing are done, we're like all parents, bragging on their newborns. *Our Stories, Our Voices* is *impressive*. Most importantly, it will be a valuable new tool for the Project.

The OLOHP has, from its inception, remained focused on gathering and preserving the stories of lesbians born in the early decades of the 1900s. For the first decade of the Project's work, almost no thought was given to our actually utilizing what we were doing. We saw our job as making sure our stories were gathered, that they were told in our own voices and that they'd be preserved for researchers.

As we continued the work of the Project, we came to believe that we could, indeed, walk and chew gum at the same time. We could use the considerable wealth of insights and stories that we had gathered now, and not just focus on research in the future. We could continue to interview, but begin spending some of our time and energy sharing the stories that we were



gathering. We began doing presentations, started our newsletter, and wrote our two books.

Now we have a new engaging way to share the work of the Project, an hour-long DVD, *Our Stories, Our Voices*. The DVD was only possible thanks to the ingenuity and devotion of a group of women from Puget Sound OLOC: readers who spent days practicing and then performing; Margaret who played a role in scripting and document design; and Kathy who helped make the project a reality, start to finish. Dr. David R. Coon, from the University of Washington, Tacoma, guided us through the tech aspects, and did the filming and the video editing – all as his gift to our community. The Pride Foundation helped, as well!

The DVD is narrated by Arden who chronicles how the Project came about and how it works. It features forty readings from 37 Herstories. Readings range from quick tidbits, to several pages long – from enlightening, to witty, to painful, to poignant.

Viewing the DVD is a treat in itself. To maximize its usefulness, Kathy P. and Margaret wrote the *DVD-Companion Guide* and handouts that will make *Our Stories, Our Voices* a useful tool for LGBTQ groups, educators, caregivers, places of worship and more.

One of the reasons this issue of *The Insider* is out a few days late was to give us time to put the ordering information up on our sparkly new website. Visit www.olohp.org to order your very own copy! (We're still working on a trailer... soon, we hope)

An Excerpt from the Herstory of Lorayne 'Chris' Christiansen...

Chris's Herstory included photos of her and Rip honeymooning in the Boundary Waters in 1955 – they were together until Chris's death earlier this year. (C: = Chris, I: = Interviewer)

C: Rip and I went to chiropractic college. We went three years straight – so we did the four years in three years. She was a year ahead of me. I decided I had to do that, too, because that would keep us together if we had the same interests.

I: Did you go into practice together then?

C: Yep. We did in 1958. We started up this little place. We were there for, I suppose, 25 years.

I: Then you retired?

N: I retired first, and then she retired.

I: Did your patients, your clients, know that you and Rip were a couple?

N: Probably not. Her family knows, because her sister asked. But they don't mention it to us, except her sister.



Chris Christiansen
Apache Junction, AZ
Born 1920, died 2016
Interviewed in 2016

An Excerpt from the Herstory of Ellen Goodrich...

Talking about going on a date, when she was in her late 20s and had already served six years in the military:

I went there and I'm sittin' with Walter, and friends of his are coming over... and Walter's gettin' up and dancing! And, you know, I see he's dancing with guys but it's not botherin' me. Then this girl came over and she asked me to dance. I said, "I'm sorry, I don't dance with girls. I only dance with guys."

I sat there and then I thought, "I'm gonna go talk to Walter." So I went running up to him on the dance floor and I said, "Walter! Walter! That girl asked me to dance with her." He said, "Well, what'd you say?" I said, "I don't dance with girls. I only dance with guys." He said, "Oh, honey, go ask her again. You're a butch." And I said, "What in the hell's a butch?" "Just go ask the girl to dance."

I waited and another song came on that wasn't a slow one. It was a two-step and it was pretty fast, so I went over and I said, "I was told I should have said yes to you because I'm a butch. I still don't know what that means, but

would you like to dance?" She started laughing. She said, "I'd love to dance." So I danced with her ...

After it was over, I took her back and I said, "Thank you." I went back and sat down with Walter. I danced that night with several girls, especially that one. So when we were gettin' ready to leave, Walter said, "Well, did you ask her to go out again?" I said, "No, was I supposed to?" And he said, "Yes."

So I went back over and I said, "Would you like to go out with me?" And so she started laughing and she said, "I'd love to." I said, "Do you want to meet me here or what?" So she said, "No, you have to pick me up." "Oh, I do?" She said, "Yeah." "Will you explain what a butch is then?" She started crackin' up. She said, "Yeah, I'll explain the whole thing to you then."

Her name was Jean and I went out with her again. And she explained a butch. I guess finally I kissed her. I was so scared of the whole thing at that point, but I did kiss her. And I thought, "This is somethin' else."



Ellen Goodrich
Houston, Texas
Born 1926, died 2016
Interviewed in 2009

Easily Entertained! Easily Confused!

As far as content goes, each story we work with really is distinctly different. The experiences that are similar are ones we'd expect, such as having a crush on a gym teacher, reading *The Well of Loneliness*, or marrying because you felt you had no other choice.

What tickles us is when we find not only the similar experiences that we expect, but the odd ones. For instance, right now, we are working on two stories in which both women played the glockenspiel! What are the chances? As far as we know, none of the other 500 women interviewed even mentioned a glockenspiel.

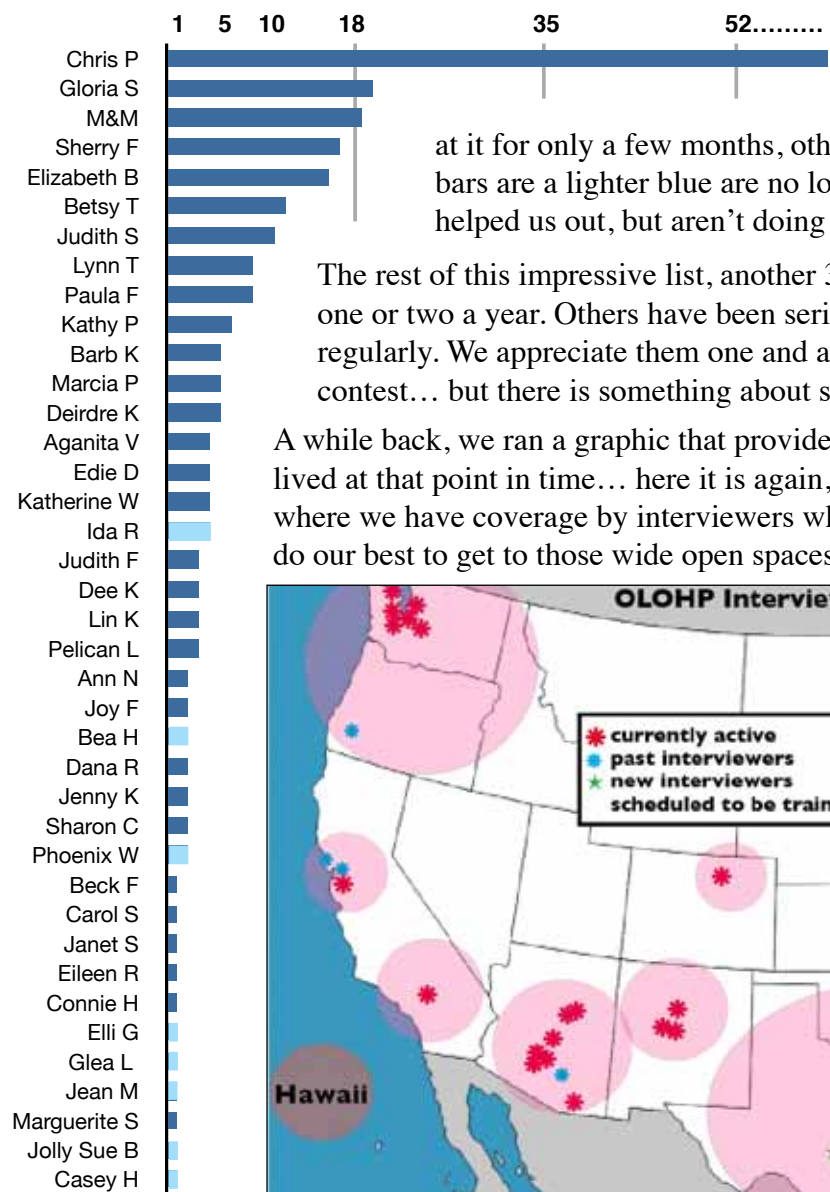
From a management perspective, keeping the 500 Herstories and their various elements (transcripts, audio files, photos, contracts, and such) organized is an interesting challenge. We recently sent someone her copy of her completed Herstory only to get one page back in an envelope with a very sweet note: "The photo of these two grandsons is beautiful, but unfortunately they aren't mine! Someone will be missing them." She's right. Someone will miss them. Unfortunately, the file came to us with a generic name, something like Scan.0063.jpg, and we failed to get it into the right folder. (We're still trying to backtrack and figure out to whom the boys belong.)

Sometimes, we're a bit challenged by the names themselves! With so many stories, we expected some of the women to share the same last names. We have several named Smith, several named Jones, and a bunch of other duplicates. Luckily, none with the same first names. But, how can it be that, after not having a similar name in the past 17 years, we suddenly are working simultaneously with the files of women whose last names are Berry, Berrey, and Beery?... and six Nancy's, five Barbara's, five Diane's and four Carol's? All at once!



Who Conducted All Those Interviews?

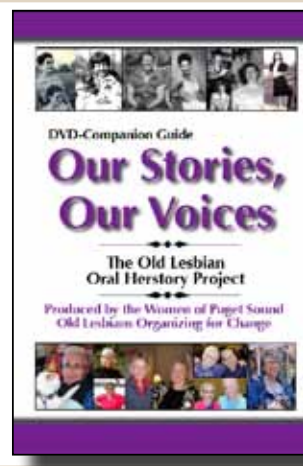
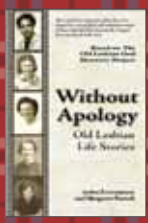
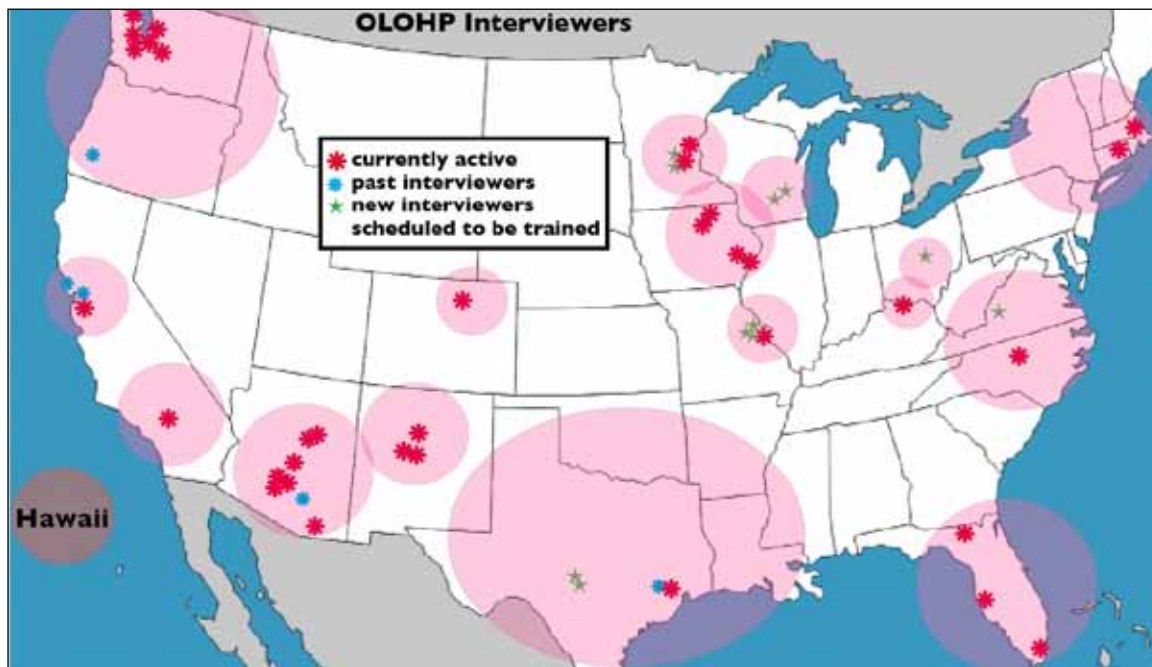
We'll start by pointing out that Arden's bar doesn't appear on the graph below, for good reason. To fit Arden's bar on the page, we would've had to reduce the graphic to where no one could read it without a magnifying glass. So let's just leave her bar to your imagination... Arden has done more than 270 interviews thus far.



Here is a visual of the rest of the women who have contributed to the Project by conducting interviews. Some have been at it for only a few months, others for a number of years. The eight whose bars are a lighter blue are no longer actively interviewing, or are women who helped us out, but aren't doing more right now.

The rest of this impressive list, another 30 names, are all active. Some are able to do one or two a year. Others have been seriously infected by our disease and interview regularly. We appreciate them one and all, no matter how many they do. This isn't a contest... but there is something about seeing your name near the top of the list!

A while back, we ran a graphic that provided a visual of where all these interviewers lived at that point in time... here it is again, updated. Light pink circular areas indicate where we have coverage by interviewers who are willing to travel. Whenever we can, we do our best to get to those wide open spaces, but it takes a bit more planning.



How can you be involved in the OLOHP?

Lesbians 70 years of age and older can tell their own stories. If you don't "qualify," encourage older lesbian friends to contact us. Buy our books and our DVD *
 Donate copies of our books and our DVD w. Guide to your library. Make a tax-deductible donation to support the Project.**
 Send us a note of encouragement!

* *A Gift of Age*, *Without Apology*, and the DVD *Our Stories, Our Voices*, can be ordered at www.olohp.org

** Tax-deductible donations can be made to the OLOHP either by using the Donate button on our website, or mailing a check.

A special thanks to OLOC, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, www.oloc.org, for their ongoing support.