

The OLOHP Insider

February 2016

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

Issue 30

Arden's Musings

To be accurate, this time around, it could have been titled, "Arden's Musing with an Assist from Margaret!" Life interfered with Arden's having time to write her piece for this issue... but rest assured, she contributed, edited and had the last word!

Just when you think you can't think of anything new to write about for the *Insider*, we're proven wrong... way wrong! Arden's Musings in the last issue ended with this teaser: *I'll tell you about one more 2015 trip in the next issue. Suffice it to say I wrote this article while watching the juncos, nuthatches, Stellar jays, and hummingbirds come and go from the feeders outside the window, surrounded by the towering Douglas firs of the Pacific Northwest.*

What was she doing up there? We can say without any hesitation that the OLOHP has an incredible cadre of women in the Seattle/Tacoma area devoted to helping, and even pushing us forward. We've written a few times about the dramatic reading format they developed for sharing excerpts from the Herstories in presentations. Well, they decided that hearing excerpts shared in this format shouldn't be limited to occasions when we can arrange to get together the readers. They've taken it one step further, creating a DVD.

The women guiding this new aspect of the Project are all members of the Puget Sound chapter of OLOC. They loosely refer to their efforts as the OLOHP.pss...Puget Sound Style! After hatching the idea, the group worked out a plan, reached out for the help they'd need to do this right, sought and found some funding, and forged ahead. Charlotte and I joined the cadre in November as the DVD was filmed. Having never been involved in what it takes to produce such a project, it was fascinating. The ability to film it in small bites went a long way to calming nerves. If you goofed, you got a do-over!

The DVD, now bearing the title *Our Stories, Our Voices: The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project*, is in post-production and getting close to being ready for release. It shares dozens of excerpts and provides an overview of how the Project came about and the work that keeps it busier than it has ever been.

There will be lots of folks to thank for this exciting undertaking, but we'll leave that for the next issue when we can tell you about how to access a copy of the DVD.

Until then, we hope you're all doing well. The Project continues to be an amazing ride for us, and we so appreciate all your interest and support.



Not all of the readers of the OLOHP Insider have met the women who devote themselves to making the OLOHP work. Here are pictures of a few of the women who conduct the interviews. Watch for more in the following issues.



Joy Fisher
Victoria, BC

Edie Daly
Gulfport, FL



Chris Pattee
Coventry, CT

Elizabeth Berrey
Albuquerque, NM



Barb Kucharczyk
Gibsonville, NC

Gloria Stancich
Gig Harbor, WA



Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older

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Words mean a lot to us, obviously! But we'll admit to getting a special, goofy smile on our faces when we get notes like these. The first is from a woman in Portland who recently shared her story...

I have been meaning to write to let you know how good I felt about sharing my story with you. I came away feeling like a valuable human being with a body of work that belongs in the world. Every woman should feel that way. I am so proud to be part of this project. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Ila Suzanne Gray



The second note is from a woman who has been working with us as an interviewer for about a year.

I AM really enjoying this! It's a privilege to be part of this Project, and to hear each womyn's story. The other thing I'm totally stuck with, is what a gift we are to each womon. Our interested, totally attentive, hours of listening so intently, is an experience some have never had, and others, not for decades.

I have observed each one I've interviewed so far, to have remembered, had insights, made connections that were new. It's what has given the womyn who are able to reveal themselves in ways they had not imagined (and sometimes regretting) later. I think this work is remarkable and wonderful on so many levels.

Elizabeth Berrey, Albuquerque

When Do the Ends Justify the Means?

Questions come up often that have to do with editing the interview transcripts. We'll let you decide for yourself whether we are guilty of taking too many liberties in this arena, but let us make our case first!

As you decide, keep in mind that while there are dozens of oral history efforts happening, we are one of the few that allow any editing at all. This step has always been a part of our process. Often, the women who are sharing their stories with the OLOHP spent decades being careful of what they said about themselves and their relationships to protect themselves. As most of us know, we don't have to be 70 or older to struggle to come up with a name when needed. Also, often, as soon as the interview is over, the interviewee realizes she forgot to include something she really wants in her Herstory.

In our opinion, offering the woman sharing her story a chance to read her transcript over and make a few corrections, adjustments and additions doesn't hurt the integrity of the Herstory – it results in a better end product.

The Project has worked with well over 400 recorded interviews, and that many unique women. Early on we realized that treating the transcription process as if our goal was to have every single word or utterance appear on paper wasn't exactly what we needed. Arden will tell you that early on she dealt with

several women who, upon seeing their exact words on paper, contacted her, distressed. Either they were upset to see how they speak typed out, or they said, "I do not talk that way!"

Our transcribers are very careful to make sure the transcript reflects the conversation as closely as possible, but we do ask them to use some discretion and leave a few words out. For instance, sometimes a woman struggles with a phrase, and then corrects herself, or starts the sentence over. Unless we feel it tells the reader something about the thought process, we leave the stumble out. Or if she had an unconscious habit of starting lots of sentences with, "So," or "I remember," we take some of those out.

As time allows, we also review the transcript as it comes back from the transcriber. Here, we are watching for typos, or places where the transcriber may have misunderstood a word or name. Again, we aren't, in our estimation, editing. We leave that to the woman herself.

We strive hard not to change the spirit of a woman's words in any significant way. Technically, the liberties we take could be deemed editing the woman's words. But we'd rather be a bit guilty smoothing the edges rather than distressing her by sending out a transcript that includes every ah, uhm, you know, so and such. If that makes us guilty, then we'll own that.



Excerpts from three stories.



Jean Martin and Fran Jackson

Fran: The language: “Dyke” was out. It was not a nice word, and we didn’t use it. “Butch” and “Fem” we knew. “Queer” we knew. “Queen” we knew, but you didn’t use them [those words] because they just didn’t seem to be useful terms. We were all just gay. Homosexual and lesbian were medical/legal terms. That’s fine, but we didn’t bother using them for identifying ourselves.

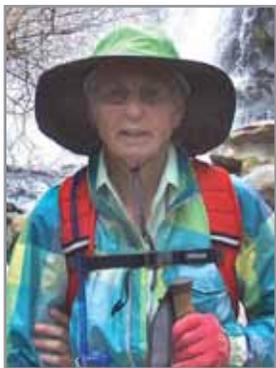
Jean: I have never been out. I have never had anybody question my world. You know, I always had a partner. I always had somebody who was there with me. I never made any secrets of anything, but never really been overt about it, in anybody’s face or anything. I never had a problem, I think. I never remember a problem on that score. My father. We had our little talk. So, I’ve been lucky.

Tangren Alexander

I didn’t like sports. I still don’t. [Laughs.] Just not that kind of a person. I was not a tomboy at all. I couldn’t understand— I remember reading *Little Women* and I just loved the story and the characters and all the sisters living together. My grandmother Pearl read that to me when I was eight years old, and that was really big for me. But I could never understand why Jo wanted to be a boy and go off to war with father! I thought that was crazy! [Laughs.] But I also got from that wanting to be an author. I wanted to be an author from the time I read *Little Women*, and I think it kind of showed me a book could be about girls. It could be about somebody that I could identify with.



*Passings ... These three amazing women will be greatly missed
We were privileged to know them.*



*Beverly Todd was born
January 1930. She was
interviewed by Arden in
2001. Bev died in December
2015 in Estes Park,
Colorado.*

*Rosemary Hathaway died
in December in Los Osos,
California. She had been born
in December 1929 and was
interviewed by Arden in 2001.*



*Jan Jiles
Born 1955
Died 2016*

*Jan had recently been
interviewed by Gloria
Stancich as part of
becoming an interviewer
herself. She lived in
Tacoma, Washington.*

Lost and Found



Starting at the end of the story, Estilita's herstory is now safely in her hands. But along the way, her story went on a most excellent, and nail-biting, adventure.

The invitation to do Estilita's interview in person in Costa Rica was very tempting, but our rational side kicked in and the interview was done via emails. Estilita warned us as we started working with her that the Costa Rican postal system wasn't the best, so to avoid a problem, all the physical mailings came and went from her niece's address in Texas who visits Costa Rica quite often.

Estilita had sent us a collection of photos that came from an album her mother had put together for her. Margaret scanned them all, assembled her Herstory, packaged it all, and put it in the mail to Estilita's niece in Texas. After waiting several weeks, it was discovered that the address she had provided was off

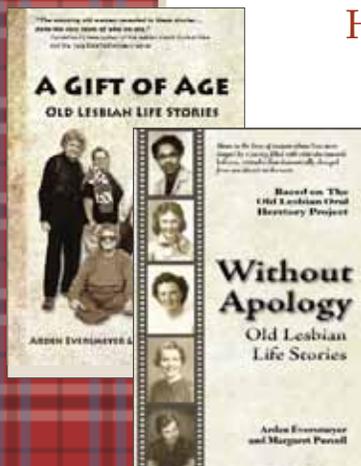
by one digit – unfortunately, it was the first digit, not the last, making delivery almost impossible. First we hoped it would be returned to us, the sender. Despite putting out a BOLO, the package remained in limbo for six weeks. We let Estilita know how sorry we were and that we would create another copy of her book. We assured her we had quality scans of all her photos, but it still hurt that the originals were lost.

That's when Estilita decided to pull out the big guns: she'd go pray to the saint of lost and stolen articles, St. Antonio. Before she could even do it, the package miraculously appeared. Someone at the US Post Office had located it, somehow figured out the correct address, and had it delivered.

Estilita says she'll make good on her promise to make a donation to St. Antonio. And the Project is not only relieved, it's singing the praises of the USPS.

Keeping on a Theme of Happy Endings...

Back quite a ways, we had the idea of writing directly to Olympus, the manufacturer of the digital audio voice recorders we use in the project, asking if there was a way we could get a discount. We use them in pairs, which means we need quite a few. Emails went back and forth exchanging extra information, but since we use models that aren't being made any longer, nothing seemed to come of it, and we went back to haunting Ebay for affordable used recorders. Months later, the Olympus rep, Tiffany.Nelson@olympus.com, was traveling and happened to think about us, realizing nothing had been resolved. While away from her office, she emailed the Project, wondering if we would be interested in a few "gently used" recorders they had in the equipment cabinet. We said yes, of course. Two weeks later, a small box appears, containing six recorders of models we regularly use. Bonus! The box also contained two recorders that we had wanted to check out, but couldn't justify buying to try out that model! Go Olympus! Go Tiffany! Go OLOHP! And how about dropping Tiffany an email thanking her on our behalf?



How can you be involved in the OLOHP?

Lesbians 70 years of age and older can tell their own stories. Contact us.

If you don't "qualify," encourage older lesbian friends to contact us.

Buy our books. *

Donate copies of our books to your local library.

Make a tax-deductible donation to support the Project.**

Send us a note of encouragement!

* *A Gift of Age: Old Lesbian Life Stories* and *Without Apology: Old Lesbian Life Stories* can currently be ordered at www.amazon.com

** Tax-deductible donations can be made to The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project either by mailing a check (address on page 1) or contacting us.

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