

The OLOHP Insider

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The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

Issue 16



Arden's Musings

What a late summer/early fall Charlotte and I had! In mid-August, we headed to Margaret and Mary's, in the Tacoma area, for a month of fun and work. It also provided a blessed relief from the Texas summer, which seems harder to tolerate each year.

On the fun side of that trip was an ice cream social, a potluck with a group of friends, a guided trip on "the mountain" (Mt Rainier) that included majestic scenery and an overnight stay at the historic inn at Paradise, two trips to see the WNBA Seattle Storm play, and visits with a gay cousin and ex-Houston pals. We really stayed on the move!

The trip wasn't all play, though. We started by taking advantage of the women in the Pacific Northwest that have either shared their stories with the project, are involved in gathering more stories, or both. It was a great opportunity to have a discussion about the OLOHP, brainstorming and making plans for how to meet challenges such as funding and reaching more women. We've struggled to find women of varied cultural/heritage backgrounds that are willing to participate in the Project. The talk was productive, giving us valuable feedback, encouragement, and some new strategies. It also brought us several new volunteers who have already begun to help.

While in Washington, I also flew to San Francisco to do several interviews. I housed with Tita Caldwell, a friend and OLOC member who had recently shared her herstory. On that same trip, I was also able to finally meet the woman who has been the main transcriber for the Project for many years. She lives in Santa Cruz. It was shocking to hear that four days after I left, Tita had died from a heart attack.

When we were all back together in Washington, we headed for Canada. First, we spent several days on Vancouver Island enjoying its unique beauty and collecting a fascinating herstory (in an area so remote the last 42 miles were on a logging road!) before traveling back across the Georgian Straights to the city of Vancouver. There, we attended the BOLD Fest where we gave a workshop and gathered more stories. And Margaret won't let me get away without telling you that while there, I was honored as the BOLD Woman of the Year.

Life didn't slow down when we returned to Texas, but it had, at least, cooled off a bit. After jumping right back into local activities and a backlog of OLOHP work, Charlotte and I did sneak away, spending three days in Galveston, away from phones, emails, and the internet. We're back now, and looking forward to lots more fun and work.

Arden, born 1931

Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older

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Time, and Technology, Waits for No One

Is that ever true! When it comes to the tools we use, it's amazing how much has changed in the fifteen years the OLOHP has been actively working to gather and preserve the life stories of old lesbians.

For the first decade, Arden carried around her trusted hand-held tape recorder, a handful of blank cassette tapes and a pile of batteries. Once the interview was committed to tape, then she carefully ran it through her dual cassette deck at home, making a duplicate to package and mail off to a transcriptionist.

Now, digital recorders that can easily capture more than a hundred hours at a time have replaced the cassette recorders and very limited capacity cassettes. Also gone are the urgent, "Wait while I turn the cassette over" interruptions. And for the most part, the sound quality on the digital recordings is so much better and consistent than the analog cassettes - no more distorted voices, hums, static and hisses.

When we went digital, we still needed to duplicate stories on a CD and mail it off for transcribing. Now we're avoiding the time, expense, packaging and trip to the post office by transferring the files via the Internet (we use Dropbox). It works like magic! As soon as the transcriber has finished, the text document returns without using a single piece of paper.

More and more women who are sharing their life stories are comfortable with email and word processing, so that is changing the process, too. Files are often sent via email for editing, are edited on screen, and sent back the same way, saving postage and packaging. Many herstories aren't even printed out now until the finished book is being put together at the end, a savings in paper, toner, and ink.

There certainly has been a learning curve for all of us. Arden wasn't sure about the digital recorders and for a couple of years, used both a digital and a cassette recorder, just in case. It wasn't until the project's primary transcriber put her foot down and said, "No more cassettes!"

And Margaret keeps saying, "Not yet, maybe never," when the subject of speech recognition software (SRS) comes up. The day may come that it's a viable alternative to using a transcriber, but for now, speech recognition software is best suited to dictations, situations where one person is speaking, where they speak clearly into a microphone, and where the application

has had time to "learn" the speakers voice patterns. When you're dealing with at least two voices, one of them new to the SRS, and there are variations in accents, voice modulation, speech patterns and such, they don't work as well. Then there is the fact that very few women tell their stories in structured sentences that flow from beginning to end. They may start, then go back to explain or add something. A person transcribing can deal with those issues, an application? Not so much.

So some then ask, "Why not let speech recognition do the basics, and later have a transcriptionist make the corrections?" At the current level of accuracy for SRS, it can actually take as much time to listen and make all the corrections as it would have to transcribe the recording in the first place.

Most compelling is the emotional argument for continuing with the old-fashioned listening and typing... a good transcriptionist will bring a document to life. She can indicate a long pause, a voice that trails off, a break in someone's voice when telling an emotional story, or make note of when someone is laughing. Bottom line: A good transcriptionist makes sure that the document isn't just a paper filled with words.

Our newest effort is a change in the way support documents are managed. For years, they were taken someplace and two color copies of each item were made, a copy for our collection and a copy to be added to the finished herstory sent to the woman who has shared the story. Completing the move from copying to scanning is our new goal and we're about half way there. Margaret, Christine and Sherry have the equipment available and are adept getting quality scans of photos, articles, and such, and it's been working well.

Not only does scanning support documents save time and money, the Project ends up with a much higher resolution photo that is already digitized. This facilitates layout of the support docs before printing, and it gives us a file that, when time allows, we can tweak to remove a splotch on a photo, lighten the shadows on someone's face, or adjust in size as needed.

When we stop a minute and look at how technology has played such a vital role in the OLOHP, it's more than a bit mind-boggling. But we're also excited, waiting to see what comes next!

Tita Caldwell

*born May 1921
in Stockholm, Sweden
interviewed at age 81
died in San Francisco
August 2012*



Vera Martin

*born June 1923
in Natchez, Mississippi
interviewed at age 77
died in Arizona
October 2012*



Recent Passings

A special note from Arden:

If one is lucky enough to live as long as I have, it is a given that we will have losses in our lives. This year, it came in bunches. It started with Sally Duplaix in July. (Her story appeared in *A Gift of Age* and we devoted space to her loss in the last issue of *The Insider*). I mentioned Tita Caldwell's sudden death in August. Since then, we have also lost Charlotte Doclar and Vera Martin, whose stories were also in our first book. Last week, I heard about Dorothy Lane (aka Sunlight). And I noticed we hadn't mentioned another loss of someone who had shared her story, Ann Deetz.

All were friends, but Vera has been especially difficult because we had a lot of history together. It has been a reminder to let my friends know I care about them. I thank all of you who have shared your life story with me. You have truly enriched my life.



Charlotte Doclar

*born April 1934
in Louisiana
interviewed at age 69
died in Houston
September 2012*



Dorothy 'Sunlight' Lane

*born May 1923
in southern California
interviewed at age 83
died in Albion, California
October 2012*



Ann Deetz

*born May 1934
in Connecticut
interviewed at age 69
died in West Jordan, Utah
May 2012*

Excerpt from a herstory...

V: I was after her again to find out what this was all about. And she said, "Well, if you really want to know, come over to my apartment in the morning and we'll talk." So I went over the next morning bright and early. She took out *The Well of Loneliness* and read me some excerpts from that. And I said, "Oh, okay." [Laughter] And we went to bed. That was it. Forty-seven-and-a-half years later I was all by myself again.

I: Yeah, but that's 47-and-a-half years that you had. And there's lots of first awakening stories like yours, you know.

V: [Laughter] Yeah, I know, but it's kind of embarrassing.

I: No, I don't think so, I think it's wonderful.

V: Well, I'm a very private person, actually. And I don't expect to ever be in another relationship. That one spoiled me for everybody else. So I've been alone for, what, 16 years now.

I had no idea what -- I don't want to use the term 'what was wrong with me,' but I had no idea what it was all about. Because when I was a little girl -- and I remember this distinctly -- when I was a little girl I could hardly wait for the Montgomery Ward catalog to come so I could leaf through it and see the ladies in their underwear. [Laughter]

I: Mm-hm.

V: [Laughter] You know, just -- never looked at the men.

I: But there was no vocabulary back then for who we were and what our feelings were.

V: No, none at all.

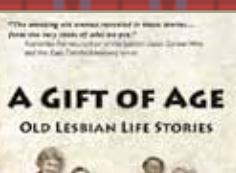


Age 23

Virginia 'Ginny' Borders
Born July 1924
Interviewed at age 85



Age 76



How can you be involved in the OLOHP?

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

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

Buy our books.*

Donate a copy of our book 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 be ordered at www.olohp.org

** Tax-deductible donations can be made to The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project either by mailing a check (address on page 1) or going to our website and using the PayPal/Donate Now button.

