

The OLOHP Insider

August 2014

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

Issue 24



Arden's Musings

Charlotte and I are just back from Oakland, CA, where we attended the OLOC Gathering. It was their ninth Gathering, and they were celebrating OLOC's 25th Anniversary. OLOC has been a sponsor of the Oral Herstory Project for years, and we are grateful for their support.

For me, the Gatherings are like a family reunion. So many of the women who have shared their life stories with the Project have become personal friends, and they often attend these Gatherings. It is a wonderful opportunity to network and meet new women who someday might share their life stories with me. This year there were several interviewers attending, and between us we collected ten new stories. At the Cleveland Gathering in 2010, I collected ten stories by myself – and missed much of the conference. So we have come a long way.

During the opening in Oakland, I was honored to be one of two to receive the Del Martin Old Lesbian Pride award. It is awarded to a lesbian 70 years or older

whose life and work has and will continue to positively impact the lives of old lesbians.

The Project had a Sunday morning plenary that was very well received. Margaret put together a beautiful picture show that covered the whole history of OLOHP. We hope the program in this format will become our "road show," and eliminate carrying so much "stuff" for presentations. While in Oakland, we also collected lists of names of women who wanted to participate in the Project. A good trip.

Something new for me: I am going to teach a class to train interviewers in the Phoenix area in November. So far there are women from AZ, NM, and TX who plan to attend. It will cut my travel and expenses hugely. If this works, we could set up classes in other geographic areas also. If there are any of you out there who are interested in the November class please let me know. If you haven't already shared your story, that would be the first item in the class.

Be well,

Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older

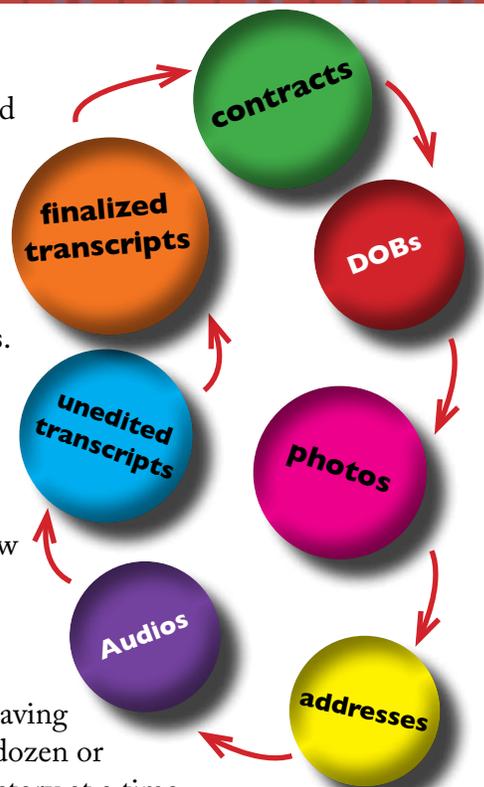
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Never Too Old to Learn?

Some days, we're not sure that whomever first said that we are never too old to learn knew what she was talking about. The OLOHP has wished for years that we had a team of women from all across the country trained and ready to take interviews when an opportunity arose. There have been interviewers helping Arden in the past, but it has usually been just one or two at a time. Now, there are more than a dozen, and that number is growing. Of course, that welcome development comes with new challenges.

In the past, if we learned of someone in northern Florida who was interested in participating in the Project, Arden would look out over the next year or two and see when she could fit a trip in. Then she'd work on arranging other interviews in the same area, or along the way if she was going to drive. But now, we have an interviewer in that area who can follow up much more quickly, and cost-effectively. Great!

So if that's good news, where does the problem come into the picture? Juggling all the pieces and parts involved in gathering and processing each story was a challenge when one or two people were involved – now we're having to hone our skills so that we can keep track of all the moving parts with a dozen or more interviewers working, and most often working on more than one herstory at a time. Despite the stress of worrying you'll lose track of a vital piece and the occasional frustration of misfiling a contract, we think we're getting it in control. We're not quite ready to market our juggling skills with the Ringling Bros, but we think we're getting there!



An
Escapee!

If you happen to see, or know of, something we've let roll away, please speak up and we'll try to scoop it back up. We do our best to learn both from our successes, and our goofs.

A Most Excellent Adventure, Indeed

Sometimes getting an interview becomes an excuse to embark on a most excellent adventure. This summer, that became true for Margaret and Mary. They were already planning to drive from Washington to Wisconsin and were delighted when it worked out that they could, with only a slight change to their route, do two interviews along the way. Diane and Marge live in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. They had contacted the Project and we'd been trying to work out the logistics of doing their interviews for two years.

M&M were traveling with friends who are also involved in the Project, so they schemed and came up with a plan. Margaret and Casey would interview Diane while Mary and Jolly Sue talked with Marge. It worked out perfectly and we added two more unique and valuable stories to the collection. As a bonus, the travelers visited the local Lakota Sioux Heritage Center, passed thru the Badlands, stopped to see prairie dogs, and saw Crazy Horse! Who knew South Dakota had so much to offer.

Diane and Marge allowed the travelers to take away their support documents (photos and such) so they could be scanned and returned later. Diane had quite a few, though Marge only had a handful. But as luck would have it, when Margaret took the photos out of their frames so they could be scanned, she found several more, including the one shown here, tucked behind the front photos. The hidden photos were a bonus, but the biggest bonus was starting friendships that we hope will last for years to come. Most excellent, indeed.



Diane, Marge and their Nubian goats

An excerpt from one of the 350 plus life stories the OLOHP has gathered.

- I: When did you meet Betty?
S: Let's see. That was... when was that now... it's been a while.
B: 1998. We emailed each other.
S: Yeah. 1998.
I: You had an email romance or friendship?
S: Well.
I: Just good friends?
S: Yeah.
B: It was just friendly until we got to meet each other.
I: How did you meet each other? (pause) You made an arrangement to go out for coffee or something?
B: The first date we went out to dinner at Thumper's in Seattle. Then to a movie.
S: (Laughter) That's when she tried to set the menu on fire!
I: Tell us that story!
S: (Laughter) Oh, Lord.
I: Sandy, I want to hear your side of that story.
S: Oh, my. (Laughter)
I: You and Betty are on your first date...
S: And we went to Thumper's, wasn't it?
B: Yeah.
S: Oh, Lord. (Laughter) I'm going to get in trouble now for that, right!
B: No. You're not going to get in trouble.
G: What happened?
S: Well...
I: Were you nervous?
S: Yeah. Sort of.
I: And the menu just went up and flames on its own?
S: Pretty much! (Laughter)
I: That's what you call a hot date! (Everyone laughing!)
B: And it made the waiter a little bit cranky. (Laughter)
I: I'll bet. Well, now, come on you two. Was it a candle or a cigarette?
B: It was a candle. A candle on the table.
S: There was a candle on the table.
B: And I got the menu too close to the candle.
S: Oh, lord. (Laughter)
I: That was a great way to start a relationship. Memorable.
S: Oh, yeah. (Laughter)

This is an excerpt from Sandy's interview. We've chosen to share it with you because it illustrates how memory issues can impact on getting a woman's story. Sandy was able to relate parts of her story, but often paused and looked to her partner, Betty, who was sitting in an adjacent area, for help. The interviewer had spent several days with Sandy at a retreat, and over that time, Sandy shared bits and pieces. But when it came to the actual interview, she needed to be prompted by others in the room. Within a few months, Sandy lost even more of her abilities. She now resides in an Alzheimer's facility.



High school graduation picture

Sandy Herbstler

Born 1941

Interviewed in 2010



At a family wedding

Passings

We were sorry to hear that two of our friends, women who had shared their stories, recently died. Both asked that they remain anonymous, so their names aren't used.

I = Interviewer N = Narrator

Jane Doe, born 1931, interviewed 2010

N: We were married 26 years. After 26 years of marriage I was the one who initiated the divorce, and we were divorced. All of this time I'm very heterosexual person, even, I look back now, a little homophobic [laughs] and so on ...

I: Well, that's part of our culture.

N: Part of our culture. You bet. The last couple years that I was in the marriage, I went to what they called a "human sexuality awareness weekend." It was mostly for students but faculty and other folks could do it, too. I suppose there weren't more than 15 people there, and it was very intensive. There was this young man, a student, who was there and he and I got put in the same group most of the time. I just thought he was the most delightful young man, and I really liked him. We talked a lot. Towards the end of the time we were together one of the things that happened by design was that he announced that he was gay. I remember just thinking, "Whoa! But I like him. But I like him. Oh! How can that be? I like him. He's a nice guy. Hmm, let me think about this." That was the first time that I knew that I knew somebody who was gay. I'm sure now that I did, but I didn't know. So that was a huge awakening.

I: I bet it was.

N: And it was the first time I'd even explored it, and thought about it.

Jean Doe, born 1936, interviewed 2007

N: Did I ever fall for Miss Jones. I had a terrible crush on her, and she kind of reciprocated. She was single, and had a boyfriend, but she was very affectionate. I was starved for affection. I couldn't really feel it with my parents. Looking back on this, I just think, "I'm searching for a substitute mother."

But oh yes, there were sexual overtones in how I felt about her and her body and how I so much longed for the hugs and so forth that she gave me. I didn't know what was wrong with me. I never told anybody else about those feelings because I didn't think anybody else would feel that way. At that time I never heard of homosexuality.

I: Right. No information out there.

N: So there's no way I could have related to that. Nothing. I don't recall seeing anything about it until I got to college.

I: Right.

N: I learned about it when I got to college. So, you know, this time I just thought, "Well, I guess I'm different from other people."

I still wanted to get married and have children. I had always wanted that. I wanted to date and I did, and as I said I was elected queen and my boyfriend was like the king. But I didn't really enjoy the kissing sessions I had to endure with the boys. [chuckles]

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.*

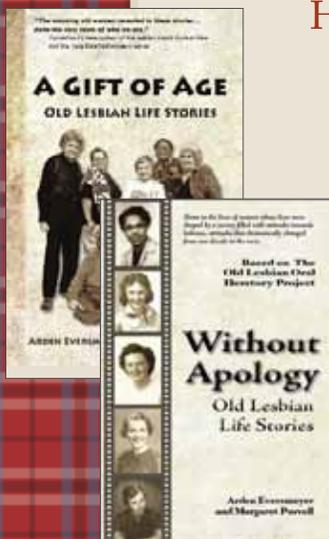
Donate a copy of our book to your local library.

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 currently be ordered at www.alibris.com

** 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.



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