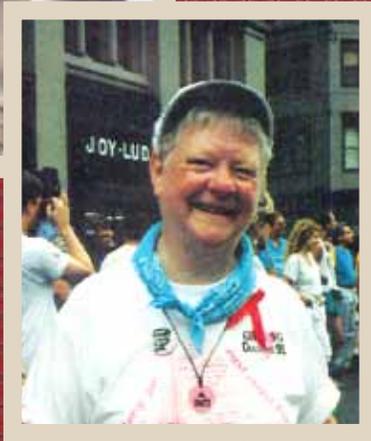
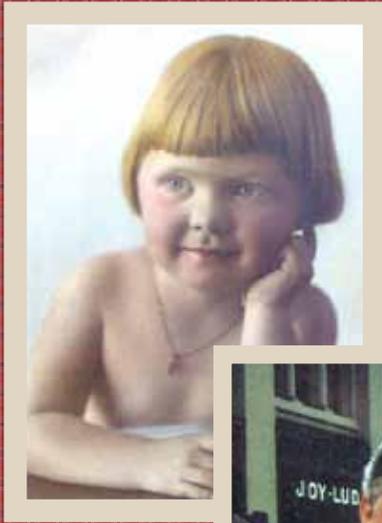


The OLOHP Insider

November 2014

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

Issue 25



As Christmas approaches, we thought we'd feature this excerpt from Arminta 'Skip' Neal's Herstory. She knew she was different from the average "southern lady." She clearly recalled the Christmas when she was five. All she wanted was a truck and a pocket knife.

I came down the stairs into the living room, and here was a little red roadster. I cried and cried, because I couldn't understand how Santa could have gotten it so wrong. I wanted a dump truck, you know. And my mother couldn't quite see her little girl going up and down the street in front of the house in a dump truck. And little girls were not supposed to have pocket knives. But dolls? Oh, I got dolls, and I took them apart. ... [Mother] would make lovely little clothes for the dolls, and I'd take them off and try to find out what made them work.

Arden's Musings

It seems like lots of things are changing in the Project. Because of the growth of the OLOHP, we are trying out some new ideas and shifting a few responsibilities. Each change feels like an improvement, each change brings new challenges, and each brings even more ideas.

I recently completed my first "class" for interviewers. Up until now, women interested in doing interviews on behalf of the Project have been trained one-on-one. In early November, a new option was tested out when I met with three women from Arizona, and one from British Columbia, for three days. Margaret had just completed revamping our *Guide for Interviewers*, so that got a test drive, too. Training more than one interviewer at a time offered several advantages. The women were able to help each other, and learn from each other's questions, as much as they were from me. We all felt good about the final outcome and plans are underway to do another early in 2015.

One of the unique aspects of the OLOHP is that, in addition to being willing and able to conduct an interview, we ask that each interviewer start by sharing her own story. We also make sure that all our interviewers are lesbians themselves, and that they aren't young women. We think these requirements help the woman being interviewed feel more at ease when she is talking with someone to whom she can relate – someone to whom she won't have to explain her experiences, fears, or historical references.

The Project continues to get referrals for new interviews all the time. Sometimes we lose the interviews, because we don't have anyone close enough to work with the subject, or we can't get to them as quickly as needed. Having trained interviewers spread out around the country would help us have a better chance of matching them with an interviewee.

On the next page, you'll see an updated map showing where the women who have been interviewed live. We'd love to fill in some of those large, open spaces! We keep on keepin' on, welcoming new interviewers and always looking for more old lesbians, especially those born before 1930, willing to share their stories. If you are interested in interviewing, or being interviewed, please contact me.

Arden

Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older

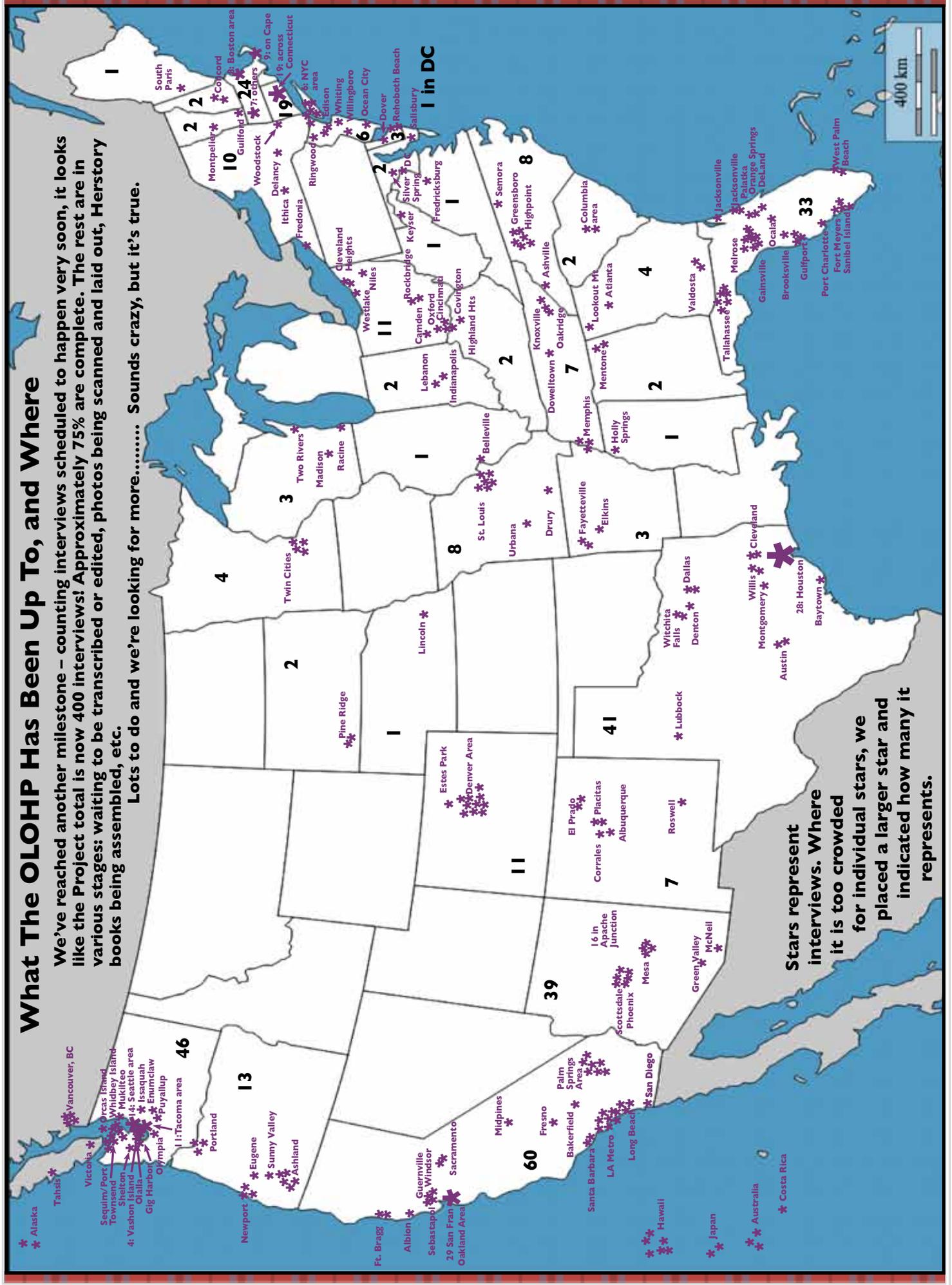
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What The OLOHP Has Been Up To, and Where

We've reached another milestone – counting interviews scheduled to happen very soon, it looks like the Project total is now 400 interviews! Approximately 75% are complete. The rest are in various stages: waiting to be transcribed or edited, photos being scanned and laid out, Herstory books being assembled, etc.

Lots to do and we're looking for more..... Sounds crazy, but it's true.

Stars represent interviews. Where it is too crowded for individual stars, we placed a larger star and indicated how many it represents.



Passings

It's been a hard couple of months. We've heard about these three women dying recently. They had shared their stories with the Project. We work hard to keep in touch with everyone, but sometimes we lose contact. We've heard of another possible death, but we've been unable to confirm it. We know, given that we work with a group who are seldom younger than 70, death is to be expected, but so many of these women have become dear friends, making it all the harder. They will be missed.



Beverly Hickock

Born 1919 • Interviewed in 2003

I always had crushes on teachers and other girls. You have to remember this was years ago, probably in the Thirties. No indication, nothing written, no organization, no books, had no idea that there was such a thing as a lesbian.

Then, in my senior year I had a dream about wanting my English professor. I went up to her and leaned over the desk and said, "I think you should know that I am sexually attracted to you." It was a dream. And, it shattered me. I believed it. When I woke up, my God, this is true. And I don't know of anyone else who discovered that they were gay through a dream.



Katherine 'Kittu' Riddle

Born 1919 • Interviewed in 2001

Last summer, when I went to the school reunion in Fort Collins, and wanted to sell copies of my autobiography, *A Nourishing Life*, I wondered what might happen. I sold fifty copies, so that was pretty good! Pretty good acceptance, and nobody came up to me and said, "How dare you!" or anything like that. Actually it's a pretty accepting group.

I am really pleased about that. I did have people come up to me and say secretly, "Changed my life-style, too." They were not out, but it was nice to be the recipient of that confidence, too.



Hannah Blue Heron

Born 1926 • Interviewed in 2006

Believe it or not, I didn't know the word lesbian. I found that out my last year in the convent. I was 40. But I had my first lesbian experience as a sophomore in college and she happened to be Catholic. That's how I converted to the Church. I was a nun for twenty years. Of course, I also learned at that time that two women making love was a mortal sin.

I came out when I was fifty. I really knew I was a lesbian at 19 and I thought it was a choice. And it is a choice, if you don't mind being unhappy. [laughs] The choice is whether or not you're going to be true to who you really are. It took me a long time to realize that. And you have to have other things fall in place... it's no fun being a lesbian by yourself!

Change of Address

Nothing lasts forever, that's for sure. First we get notice that the post office location where we have always received our mail will be closing next year. The old address will stay valid for another year, but we're trying to get a jump on changing the address with all our various friends, transcribers, businesses, the State, IRS and others.

We went ahead and obtained a new box at another branch. And while we can't do anything about the old address appearing in our books, we went ahead and printed new business cards and brochures, and updated the address on our print materials. Then, wouldn't you know, less than three months later, they notify us that the new-to-us post office branch is closing as well! After the initial grumbling over having to change everything again, we read a bit further and found that the new address won't be changed - instead, they'll simply move the location of the box.

Here is the new, and hopefully permanent, address. It is truly amazing how many places an address is on record!

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Dragons and Parrots!

Almost without fail, when we have a discussion about costs we incur in this project, and we mention that transcription is one of the more expensive elements, we are asked why we don't use one of the speech recognition programs, such as Dragon. We have looked into it before. But given that technology enables us to do amazing things these days, when it's suggested again, we go back and take a fresh look at the options. We're always hopeful.

Recently, we contacted the folks at Dragon: "How well does Dragon do with transcribing interviews? Yes, we're talking about two voices. It's an interview. Yes, the voices are both being captured on the same recorder at the same time."

"Well, of course our product can help. This is how you do it: You set up two recorders, and have the people sit far enough away from each other that the recorders don't pick up both voices. Then you train Dragon to learn each voice, run those recordings through Dragon, and re-combine the transcripts after the fact." Do what!?

Not to be dissuaded that their software would help us, the next suggestion was equally inventive: "What you really need to do is called 'parroting.'" First, train the software to your transcriber's voice. Then the transcriber listens to the recording via headphones. Next, set up a microphone to input the transcriber's speech into your computer. The transcriber then dictates out loud everything they are hearing in the headphones and the app will convert it to text."

Hmm. Hope may spring eternal, but we're thinking we may wait for the technology to get a bit better.



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.*

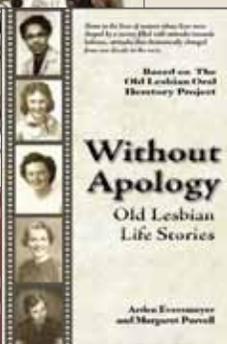
Donate a copy of our book to your local library.

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 amazon.com and 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.