

The OLOHP Insider

April 2011

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

Issue 9



Musings from Arden

As much as I hate to do it, I have cut back on travel this year. Seven trips last year was fun, and very productive, but also a bit tiring. (Margaret says I have to stay healthy for ten more years for us to complete what we've already started at this point!) So I am putting a lot of eggs in three baskets this year. The first was the Arizona trip that I wrote about in the last issue.

The next will be a big one and it begins in early July when Charlotte and I will go to Madison, Wisconsin for the National Women's Music Festival. This has become an annual event for us. We will soak up the music, stay with friends we don't often get to see, and spend several days surrounded by lesbians of all ages. A tough job, but I think we're up to it! We'll also have some interviews set to go while we're in that area.

From Wisconsin, we'll move on to the lush Pacific Northwest, to Tacoma, Washington, where we'll stay through the 2011 Regional OLOC Gathering set for July 28-31. I already have commitments for several interviews to be done at the Gathering, but part of the fun is being in a room full of old lesbians

that I can talk to about giving impromptu interviews. Those unplanned interviews have produced some very interesting stories.

The OLOC Gathering is going to be exciting with lesbian historian Lillian Faderman giving the keynote speech, and Lucie Blue Tremblay as entertainment. Some unusual panels and workshops are also being planned, and a theatrical reading performance is being developed around the Oral Herstory Project. And in our spare time, Margaret and I will do a workshop about the OLOHP!

Unplanned interviews have produced some very interesting stories.

OLOC really does honor old lesbians. It's a good place for all of us to be. If you are interested in going, visit their website at www.psoloc.org or email them directly at pnwgathering@psoloc.org. They are working hard to help everyone who wants to attend.

If you plan to come to the Gathering, if you are at least 70 years of age, and if you would be willing to share your life story with me - please contact me at arden1931@yahoo.com. If you live in the Seattle/Tacoma area and cannot attend the Gathering, I would still like an opportunity to hear your story. I hope to meet you in July.

Arden, born 1931

Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians Born in the Early 1900s

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Mother's Day is just around the corner. All too often, all we hear are the stories of how sad or horrible something was. Unfortunately, those stories happen all too often. But so do the good ones, so we thought we'd share a few of the more positive quotes about coming out to children and grandchildren from mothers in the collection.

Joanne:

Brian said to me, and I can't even remember the setting that we talked, he said to me, "Mom. You gotta do what you gotta do."

Rosemary:

I told the boys, and was worried about their reaction, but I don't think I needed to be. They said, "That's ok, Mom. Whatever ... " You know, "It's whatever makes you happy." That's really important.

Jo:

My granddaughter asked her mother about it and it was explained. And she said, "Well, I think I'm a lesbian, too, because I really love my girlfriends."

Cynthia:

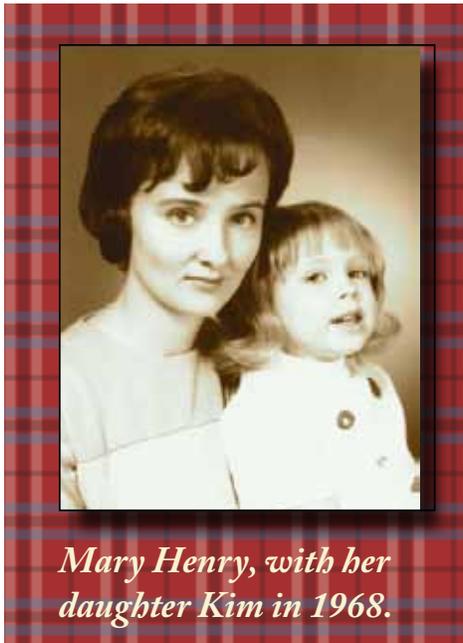
I'm out to my son. I have been for years. He's been extremely supportive and we've been quite honest about it.

Ruth:

My son was a little upset about wanting a divorce. He found out that I was going to be with a woman. He said, "It was enough that I have to deal with my sister and her girlfriends. Now I have to deal with my mother and her girlfriends." That was his initial response. And I said, "Well, my girlfriend isn't my girlfriend like your sister's. It's Shevy. Do you know Shevy?" He says, "I like Shevy." I said, "She will be my partner." "Oh, well that's okay."

Annalee:

I didn't know what was going to happen, and I told him that I was really scared to tell him, to which he responded, "What did you think I was going to do? Fire you?" I laughed. I didn't know. Actually, I was afraid he'd run away or disown me.



Mary Henry, with her daughter Kim in 1968.

Dee:

I said, "Is there anything you want to ask me, questions? Do you have any feelings about it?" He said, "No." I said, "Does it surprise you?" And he said, "No." He said, "If you were married," he said, "that would surprise me." (I had been divorced for over fifteen years.) "But since you're not, that doesn't surprise me." And that was that.

Beth:

My oldest daughter, Lynn, she and her partner, they had a lot of lesbian and gay friends. Julie did too, my second daughter. My son, Brian said, "Anything that makes you happy, Mom."

Mary:

I was amazed. I really was. When I told my daughter, Tobey, it was, "Well yeah, Mom."

Excerpts from a few of the Herstories

***Leann
Swofford
Born 1938***

***From her
2008 Interview***



2008

I wanted to be a veterinarian. I grew up with this dog, and this little dog slept in the bed with me and she would go anyplace with me. I'd ride my bicycle – she'd be in the bicycle basket. I'd fall down on my bicycle – she'd jump out. She was just always with me. She was a Boston terrier. I didn't play with dolls very much. When I was two years old, we went to a department store that had a lot of the animated things in the windows. I'd go in, and my parents would throw me all these dolls and all these girly things. I was interested in the electric train. I was fascinated.

So, next year we got an electric train for my Christmas. Each year we added to that electric train; added an inside track, and we had a trolley car. My dad, being an engineer, built a big control panel with switches and buttons.... I had a guinea pig, and the train had a little open boxcar on it. I put that guinea pig in it... give that guinea pig a ride and come up to a bridge. If it didn't duck, it got its head bonked. That was the kind of things I was interested in.

My poor little doggie, she was so good. I played doctor with her. Mother would find the poor dog laying on her back in a stroller with her leg with a brace on it and wrapped up, you know, splint on the leg. And I had forgotten about it and I was just off playing with somethin' else. And here's this dog still laying there, all bandaged up.

We had our favorite veterinarian, and went and talked to him, saying I wanted to be a veterinarian. And he says, "Oh," he says, "You know, all these Army veterans are coming out now." He says, "They're flooding the market. And there's just no," you know ... "No place for women." I don't think he actually said 'women,' maybe he did. But he did discourage me to the extent that I did not go to veterinary school. And I would have been a doggone good veterinarian. I really would have.

The reason I wanted to be a chem engineer was because I would go to the U [University of Minnesota] on engineering days. They would have open houses. I had done that two or three years. When I was a senior, I got some of my friends from school to go with me so that was fun. But, the chem engineer kids always had a still running. That's what intrigued me! I didn't want to be an engineer. I wanted to be with people who had a still running!

I had made dandelion wine when I was a sophomore. It bubbled all over the kitchen floor, so I started early. Anyhow, they weren't letting women into IT (Institute of Technology) back then. I persisted and I was one of the first women ever allowed into IT. I had been in a girls high school and the method of instruction... the thought patterns for males and females... I don't care what you say, or at least for me, it was just too different and I wasn't getting it.

After one quarter, I thought, "I can't do this." So I switched to the farm campus. I thought that I would do food research, so something in Home Ec. I did that a quarter and then it was like, "I can't be working to save money to pay my tuition." I had to feed my family. I quit that and I went to work for the library.

***Joanne McGibbon
Born December 1942
Died October 2010***

***From her
Interview in 2010***



N: I was probably a feminist all my life and didn't think about it until it came up, until the movement came along and gave me support in that. When I was twelve years old there was a big prairie fire going on down south of town. They let all the boys out of school to go fight the prairie fire. I didn't think that was fair. I mean, why couldn't the girls go? So after school that day I gathered all the girls together and I said, "I think that we ought to not go to school tomorrow and we ought to all go down and help fight the prairie fire."

So, we did. I mean, it was great! We all went down with our wet gunnysacks, and were banging the ends. And, of course, I got called to school – I had gotten all the girls to not go to school and go into this. Because it was during the war, and it had just started, we each had to pick up a gallon of nails that would puncture tires. That was our penance. It just seemed so ridiculous to me, so I took my gallon bucket, went down by the railroad track, and picked up the big spikes that they used to hold down the tracks that were laying along there. I filled up the whole bottom with that and put some little ones on the top so it wouldn't take me very long. I took it in and, of course, the principal saw what it was, and she said, "I might know you'd do something like that, Rosemary."

I don't remember resenting my brothers when I was younger. But, I still saw these older men who had all these privileges.

I didn't think about it until Friedan's book [*The Feminine Mystic*], and I thought, "Whoa! That's where that came from."

I've always called myself a lesbian. That's part of the feminist process. That is part of coming out later in life, and not as, say, a teenager. As far as I was concerned, if you were a feminist you had to be a lesbian and if you were a lesbian, you had to be a feminist. Well, I got a rude awakening on that one! I'd meet lifelong lesbians, who wouldn't ever use the word 'lesbian'. They might use the word 'gay.' But certainly not 'feminist'.

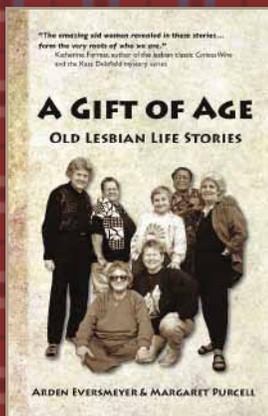


1965

**Rosemary
Hathaway**
Born December 1929
Interviewed in 2001



1995



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 a copy of *A Gift of Age: Old Lesbian Life Stories*.*

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* 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 in page 1) or going to our website and using the Donate Now button. You can also support the OLOHP by making a donation to OLOC, one of our sponsors, telling them it is on our behalf. Visit their website at www.oloc.org, or write PO Box 5853, Athens, OH 45701.***



Totally great. Loved reading every story, enjoyed hearing the details of how Smith wanted the books presented
Enjoyed Arden's story. All very good. SW