

# The OLOHP Insider

4<sup>th</sup> Issue for 2016

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project



## *Arden's Musings*

Another issue... it seems like each time a new *Insider* comes due and Margaret reminds me to send in my article, I wonder, "What can I possibly write about that is new?" After all, this is the 33rd *Insider*. But after I sit and watch the cursor blink at me for a bit, I start to type...and before long, I realize what to write about wasn't really a problem at all... the problem becomes knowing when to stop typing!

This year has been one filled with lots of changes for me personally, difficult changes because they flow over onto this Project, which has been an everyday part of my life for almost two decades now. Deciding I really needed to slow down a bit, to focus more on myself, Charlotte, and other aspects of my life, was easier said than done. The decision to make the changes was hard, but taking the necessary actions was an even bigger challenge than I expected. That said, I have managed to cut way back on my travels and I spend less time in my office. Now I focus more on my sugar, Charlotte, my friends and family. My life feels more balanced.

Don't take that to mean I'm done, by any means! I'm still wakened in the middle of the night with ideas about the OLOHP. And, as lots of my friends will tell you, I've certainly not lost my ability to talk ad nauseam about the Project! When I meet women 70 and older with stories we haven't gathered, I can't help but get a bit twitchy. I'd have to enter into a full twelve-step program if I ever wanted to truly quit working on the Project! But since that isn't really my goal, don't worry.

One of the reasons I'm comfortable with being less involved in the daily work of the Project now is that I know, with absolute certainty, that others understand its importance and love it, too. It took me a while to get used to women thanking me for letting them work on the Project, but it happens quite often, and I'd like to share a few of them here.

"Everybody's story empowers me. And everybody's story is important." Judith F.

The OLOHP has enriched my own old lesbian life and I am glad to be a part of it." Betsy T.

"I feel privileged to have a small role as an interviewer, meeting wonderful women, and helping them preserve their life stories." Barb K.

"Thank you, for including me in this magnificent journey!" Aganita V.

"I feel limitless gratitude for Arden the person; the contribution she has made and continues making; and, the deeper connection I feel for our community from having participated." Marcia P.

"I'm a person who always needs something meaningful to do, and OLOHP came into my life at just the right time." Chris P.

"I can't begin to tell you the things I have learned while involved in the Project and all the ways it has expanded and enriched my life! It has been, and continues to be, an honor." Margaret P.

*Arden*

*Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older*

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## Stretching Out in New Directions

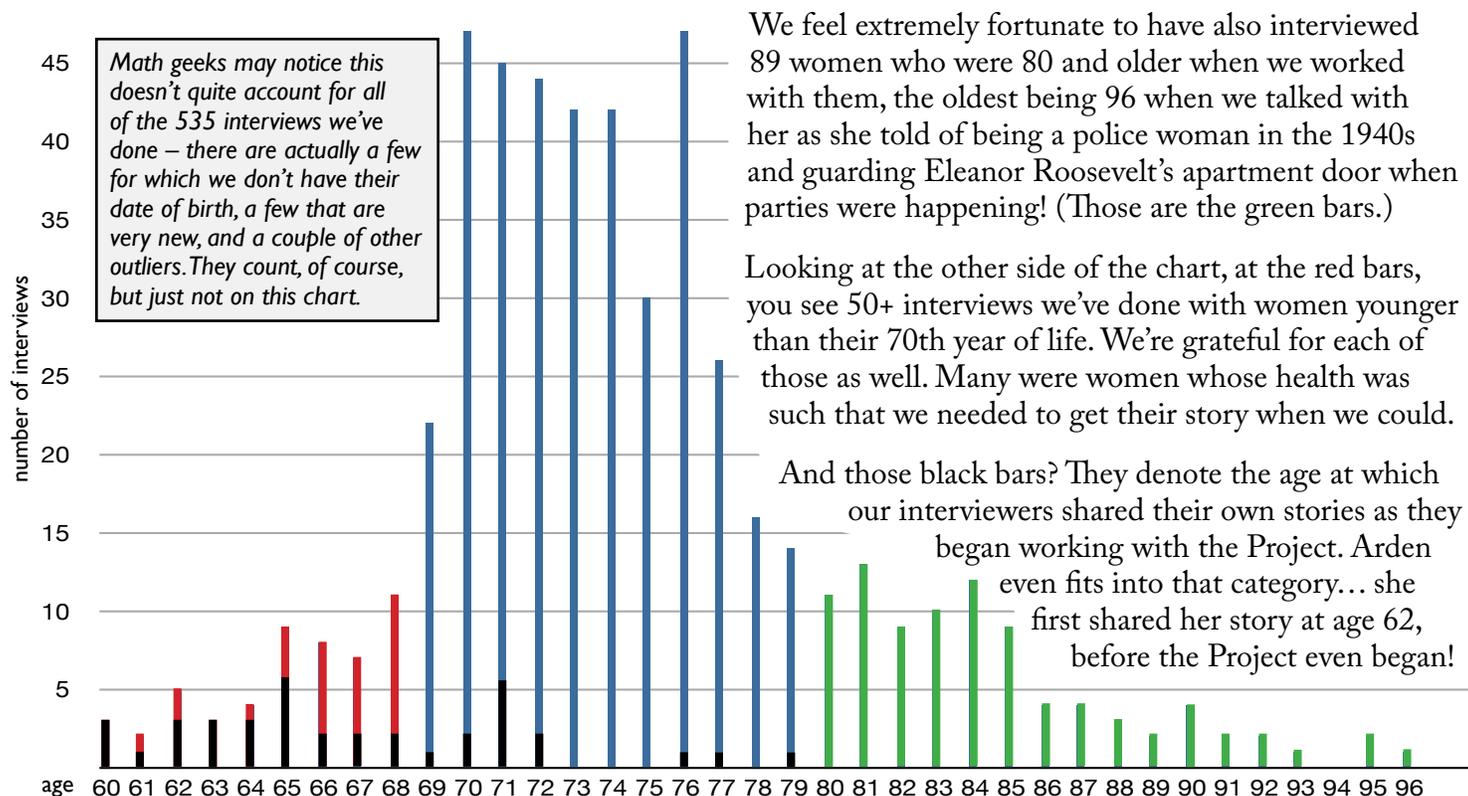
by Kathy Prezbindowski, OLOHP Interviewer



Margaret shared in the most recent *Insider* a bit about the fourteen women that were trained as new OLOHP interviewers at the four-day training held in Madison, WI. Arden Eversmeyer led the event in late June, immediately before NWMF (National Women’s Music Festival) there. Women from eight states earned their interviewer stripes. The event also included twelve experienced interviewers, literally traveling from coast to coast, from Florida to Washington. Ruth Benton (b. 1943) of Cincinnati (pictured on the right) was one of 14 new trainees, although that wasn’t in her plans. Ruth was there in Madison for the music festival, and to meet up with friends, and sat in at the beginning of the training out of curiosity. A few hours later, she was hooked. Ruth had already been interviewed for the Project. Since participating in the training, she has observed two additional interviews conducted in Cincinnati. During a three-week visit to the Puget Sound region in October, Ruth was invited to present her Herstory in what they called an Ignite talk – like a Ted talk, but at lightning speed – at the Fabulous Aging Conference sponsored by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. (Distilling Ruth’s story into a 5 minute presentation was quite a challenge.) The full-day conference was designed to educate providers to increase sensitivity and improve the lives of LGBTQ elders. Ruth and I staffed a table at the event with additional information about the OLOHP, as well as a digital display and a triptych sharing Ruth’s story and historical photos. Numerous attendees stopped by to thank Ruth for her courageous presentation and to learn more about our two organizations.

## Numbers That Tell Their Own Story

Hundreds of women have generously shared their interesting life stories with the Project, but the numbers in our database tell an interesting story as well. Most of you know we concentrate on doing interviews with women 70 and older, which is reflected in this bar chart – roughly 70% of the women interviewed were 69-79 years old. Those are the blue bars. If you’re wondering why we include 69 in that group, we ascribe to the way of thinking that says when you’re born, you start your first year. Thus, as you turn 69, you are starting your 70th year of life.



*Excerpts in this issue are from amazing women who have recently died – they will be missed.*

**Irene Weiss, born 1926**  
**77 when first interviewed in**  
**Apache Junction, Arizona**

**Interviewed again at age 84**  
**in Sequim, Washington**

**Interviewers:**  
**Arden and Marcia P.**

**Died 2016**



While I was in nurse's training, I had many relationships with women, nurses. I had a big crush on a teacher. She knew it and tried to explain to me how it was wrong... blah, blah, blah. By that time, I was no longer feeling that it was bad to be a lesbian. I had read many psychological and psychiatric texts by this time, and I had decided that, like Freud (who was very big in those days) said, I was probably stuck in my psychosexual development at that stage. I couldn't help it, you see. I was not 'bad' anymore, I was just stuck somewhere. Which is comforting, not to be bad. Even though that was wrong, too, that idea. But it worked for me for a while.

I did well in nurse's training. I had relationships. One girl was kicked out because of our relationship, and I was saved because I was younger. They assumed that I was led into it, which was totally wrong. Then in my senior year, I fell in love with a patient of mine. I actually seduced her, I guess. She was a married woman with two children. I worked the night shift, and after she was discharged, I used to go to her house in the morning. Her husband was gone for the day, and we'd spend the whole day together, with two little kids running around. They weren't even of school age. We had a big relationship.

Finally one day she called me in the middle of the night. By this time I was graduated and living in the residence of another hospital that I worked in. She said that her husband kicked her out because she told him [about us]. This was two o'clock in the morning and she was in her nightgown. So I got her and I sneaked her into the nurse's residence. She lived there with me for a couple of weeks. Finally, one day, her father called me and said he wanted to talk to her. She went outside to talk to him, and he grabbed her and kidnapped her.

Her father then called the Director of Nurses and threatened to make the whole thing public unless they discharged me and he had this small local

newspaper. The Director – this tall wonderful looking woman who probably never had a carnal hand touch her body in her life, this sweet spinster – I know she was terribly shocked. She called me into her office and asked me and I admitted it. She asked me if I wanted psychiatric help. I was smart enough to say, "No." But she said, "I have to let you go, but I'm going to let you resign." I often wonder. She was shocked, but she was sympathetic, and I wondered what had gone on in her life. So I gave a formal resignation, and then I went home and told my family.

I told them that I was in love with Phyllis, and that I loved her like a man loves a woman. I didn't know how else to say it. And my mother was shocked, my father was stunned. I know they must have had ideas, because my mother had said to me when she saw how friendly I was with Phyllis, "You shouldn't be so friendly with a married woman. Sometimes a friend can come between a woman and her husband." You know.

I thought to myself, "I have to tell them." And this was 1948-49. My father said, "How could you not control your animal actions?" He didn't say, "How could you be like this?" He said, "How could you not control...?" I love it. Very interesting. Then he said I should have drowned myself before I came home and told him that. Anyway, I told my family that I had resigned, that I applied for a job in a hospital in New York and I was going there. They approved that I should leave town – I had disgraced them. My time was up at the hospital and I was staying at home, because I hadn't heard from the hospital in New York yet and my mother decided she couldn't let me go. She begged me not to move to New York. "No one will ever know. Stay at home with me, and we'll be good friends, you and I. No one would need to know."

I was just supposed to hide out. She thought she meant well. I don't blame them now, even though I blamed them then.

*Excerpts in this issue are all from amazing women who have recently died – they will be missed.*



***Beth Barfield, born 1930, died 2016  
Interviewed in 2008 by Arden E.***

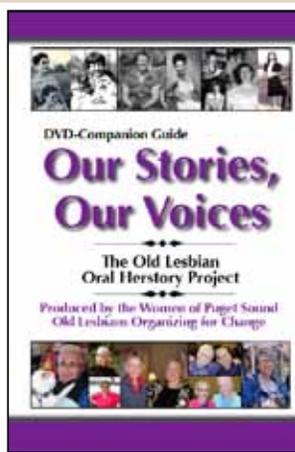
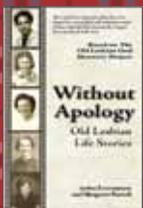
I was getting on toward fifty... I was going to our local human growth and development center and a woman came with one of her anger assertiveness workshops and a bunch of lesbians came up from Chicago. I was fascinated by them, the way that they were assertive with each other and they were working out issues from old relationships and they were being so straight forward. I hadn't seen that much with women. I'd seen women that were kind of subservient to their men and I was somewhat myself. These women were just being straight on with each other and I was fascinated.

I got into the lesbian community in Milwaukee, and I saw it more. I was, first of all, fascinated by lesbian women, lesbian feminist women, by who they were, not what they were. Not that they were lesbians, the sexuality thing. It was more who they were and somewhat political. I was seeing a whole new view of women and what and who they could be. I had always looked at lesbians, all my life, I was always fascinated with them. So I was always aware but up until that time, I had seen myself as heterosexual.

***Ocie Perry, born 1926, died 2016  
Interviewed in 2008 by Arden E.  
(photos on page 1)***

I went to St. Mary's School of Nursing. I was the first African-American to enroll at this school of nursing in Kankakee, Illinois. They wanted an African-American student with a good background, and my background had proved to be pretty good. The nun had told the board members that she wanted to introduce me and show my scholastic records to say that I qualified. They then decided to accept the first black student there. I was really happy and proud to be able to go there.

[After graduation] I'm dating guys from time to time, but all the time I had this thing about, I would see a woman and have a different feeling. But I would right away go, "This is silly. That's crazy. Why am I even thinking like this because this doesn't even make sense?" So what it was was denial. I was feeling this, but I was in denial about it. To back up a little bit, while I was in training, when we had these psychoanalysts that helped all the nurses that needed to come and talk. I actually told him how there were occasions when I was attracted to women. "What do you think is wrong? Is there something wrong with me? Because I know I shouldn't be doing that. That's wrong." He said, "What's making you think that's wrong?" I said "The Bible teaches against it – sodomy – and two people of the same sex. It's frowned upon by God." He said, "But where? What God are you talking about?" It really struck me, because he was asking me questions that I had never been asked before. He said, "This God that you are talking about, does he love people? Does He love?" I said, "God is love!" He said, "Then why would He not want you to love?"



### **How can you be involved in the OLOHP?**

Lesbians 70 years of age and older can tell their own stories. If you don't "qualify," encourage older lesbian friends to contact us. Buy our books and our DVD \* Donate copies of our books and our DVD w. Guide to your library. Make a tax-deductible donation to support the Project.\*\* Send us a note of encouragement!

\* *A Gift of Age, Without Apology, and the DVD Our Stories, Our Voices, can be ordered at [www.olohp.org](http://www.olohp.org)*

\*\* Tax-deductible donations can be made to the OLOHP either by using the Donate button on our website, or mailing a check.

**A special thanks to OLOC, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, [www.oloc.org](http://www.oloc.org), for their ongoing support.**