

The OLOHP Insider

#35... 2nd Issue for 2017

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project



Displaying attitude even at four years old!



"Dressed in drag as a straight woman."

Annalee Stewart



In her 70s, protesting on the capital steps, with her walker.

Totally Out of the Box for Us...

This issue of the Insider is different than any we've done for three reasons. First, we have lots of regular news to share, which made it longer. Secondly, we are using this issue of *The Insider* to tell you about something new we're doing and asking for your help on it (see page 2). And third, we're also using it to tell you about the fundraising campaign we've just started. We hope you'll both enjoy the newsletter, and be able to help us!

Arden's Musings

They say as you age it's important to stay busy and try new things. Having just turned 86, I think it applies to me. Stay busy? No problem here! This has been an incredibly full year already, and it's only June.

I'd love to say what's keeping me the busiest is the Project, because it's still going strong and we have a variety of tasks underway. I seem to be going through one of those phases where life seems to interfere with the best laid plans. And I wish I could tell you my distractions have all been fun, but I'd have to employ some alternate fact skills to do that. Most of you know we live in Houston where the winters are so mild that the insects don't mind it... and don't mind driving you crazy. We've been dealing with sand fleas, which seem to think my ankles are especially attractive!

When I'm not scratching the flea bites, I've been working on a couple of tasks that have been needing doing for years. One has been sorting, organizing and boxing up 30 years' worth of paper and memorabilia for LOAF, which I've been a part of since its inception. When my first partner died, I couldn't find any place for lesbians my age to meet, so I helped form a social group called LOAF, Lesbians Over Age Fifty, and it's been going strong ever since.

Of course, I'm still doing some OLOHP work as well. I've done a few interviews in Texas this year already and have three more planned for this summer. Along with Margaret, simply keeping up with incoming interviews and guiding them through the various steps once we have the audio is a big task. Charlotte and I are planning on our yearly pilgrimage to the National Women's Music Festival midsummer, and Kathy Prezbindowski and I will do a workshop on the Project. I'm working on some of the indexing we've started, too. The first story I did happened to be Annalee Stewart who died recently. I was Annalee's interviewer. Hard to believe that interview was 17 years ago. Reviewing her story over has been bittersweet. You can read more about Annalee on page 4, and that's her over on the left of this page.

There is more about our indexing and abstracts effort on the next page. We're hoping to involve quite a few of you in this undertaking. And please take time to read about our efforts to raise some funding as well.

Arden

Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older

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Evolving Yet Again, and We'd Like You To Take This Step With Us!

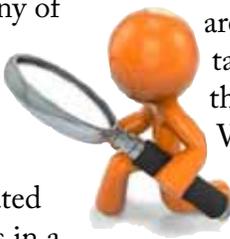
For almost two decades, no matter what else we've taken on, we've continued to seek out more women to interview before their stories get away from us, and we hope to continue to add to this collection of unique and important stories for a while yet.

That said, this is where we add, "But..."

While we continue to interview, we're embarking on a big new adventure, one we're hoping many of you will take part in. To make all of the wealth of information contained in the hundreds of interviews we've conducted, we're tackling the job of creating a finding aid for each herstory. Finding aids are created to provide a detailed description of what is in a collection that is being archived. Smith College has one for the OLOHP. We're taking this process one step further and creating a similar document for each interview we've conducted.

Though our finding aids will be similar to indexing, we won't be noting the page numbers where a person, place of things is mentioned. Now, once you know that info is in there, you can let the computer find the page(s) for you.

We'll stop here for a minute and give you a quick example of how we believe this undertaking will be useful. For instance, until now, if Susan was researching experiences of lesbians in the military during World War II, and she wanted to know where to find that in the OLOHP collection, she had two choices: 1. Get comfy, and start reading the hundreds of transcripts at Smith College in Massachusetts in hopes of finding what she was looking for. Or 2, Contact the Project directly to see if we could point her to the most useful transcripts.



When the Project was working with 100, or even just 200, interviews, we had a pretty good grasp on which women had talked about what subjects and we could help direct researchers to the right transcripts. But as the numbers kept growing, our ability to keep that many details at hand went from challenging to impossible.

We've tested, tweaked and refined our format and are now looking for volunteers who are willing to take a story (or two, or three, or more!) and using the form we've designed, make the notes we need. We can provide hard copies of the transcripts, or digital versions. There is a learning curve at first as you become more familiar with our form and the process, but once you get going, you'll get the swing of it.

This is the point at which you raise your hand and say, "Me. I'll give it a try!" If you think you'd like to be involved in this phase of the Project, please email Margaret: margaret.oloHP@gmail.com, and she'll get you what you'll need. We don't expect to be able to get this all done this summer, but we'd love to make a large dent in it!

But Wait, There's More!

If indexing doesn't appeal to you and you'd rather help in a different way, we're also working to create an abstract (a short summary) for each woman's herstory as well. You can find examples of those on our website – look on the page of Profiles.



As with the finding aid, reach out to Margaret if you'd like to have a go at crafting a few abstracts.

Issues of the OLOHP Insider

We spent some time a couple of weeks ago adding a PDF for every issue of the OLOHP Insider to our website, and in doing so, we made a very interesting discovery. Somehow, we managed to skip right over #19... given that issues #18 and #20 happened when they were supposed to without any gap in the dates, we can only plead confusion! If you'd like to see the other 30+ issues, visit www.oloHP.org



She Sure Is Consistent!

You've got to admit, Arden is nothing if not consistent. Buried in a recent email to Margaret about a handful of other things they're working on, Arden casually said, "Oh, did I mention I was selected honorary grand marshal of the Houston Pride Parade this summer?" Given that the honorary grand marshal is selected by three others who have received that honor in the past, we'd say that's worth more than a casual, "Oh, did I mention...!"

Side Benefits

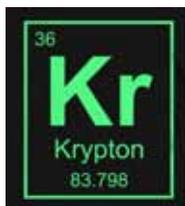
One valuable aspect of the OLOHP is the connections women who work on the Project build with each other. The photo on the right features three interviewers... not working on the Project together, but spending time with each other, strengthening and enjoying their friendship. That's Judi Feingold, Beck Forth and Dana Rosenberg. Judi lives year-around in Green Valley, Arizona. Dana and Beck are snow birds there, migrating back to eastern Iowa for the warmer months each year.



Not all of them live near enough geographically to connect – we wish there were more opportunities to spend time together. We're spread across the country. On the upside, being spread out helps us reach women from all over who are willing to share their stories. We have interviewers living in 16 states, and interviewing in almost all of the rest of them. Fortunately, we have some travelers in the group! Interviewers do stay connected with each other and the Project via a Yahoo group and email, but it's especially nice to see, or hear about, their socializing, too.

Close Call With Kryptonite!

It's not unexpected to have the audio quality vary some from one interview to the next. Voices vary, as do the settings. Even when the audio is less than ideal, we've been able to employ a variety of tricks to improve them so that transcribing isn't too difficult. However, with two recent audios, we've come close to meeting our kryptonite and crying Auntie!



One was recorded while sitting outdoors in what the two voices described as a "peaceful, quiet setting." We can only speculate that they were both so engrossed in the conversation that they didn't hear all the birds singing nearby or the planes that regularly passed overhead!

Then a unique set of circumstances conspired to give us a new challenge. Gloria is an interviewer who is now home bound, but she isn't willing to let her limitations keep her from interviewing. There was one interview she especially wanted to do with someone whose health kept her from being able to come to Gloria's home, so that interview was done over the phone. While that has worked for us before, we didn't factor in Gloria's oxygen equipment cycling on and off, and a mystery electrical interference that almost obscured parts of the exchange. We considered saying the Kryptonite had won when YouTube came to the rescue! In minutes, we were able to find several video tutorials that walked us through minimizing the noises using a high pass filter. Without it being her intent, Gloria has now empowered us and that valuable audio has been transcribed!

News From Friends

We'd like to pass along two bits of news that were shared with us and that may be of interest to you...

From interviewee Laura Boch:

Laura's new memoir has just been published! *Red Diaper Daughter, Three Generations of Rebels and Revolutionaries* is available through local bookstores, indibound.com and Amazon.com.



From Dorothy Riddle, whose mother was interviewed for the Project:

"I wanted to let you know about an initiative, Hidden Mobility Disabilities Alliance, that I've started. I believe it's relevant to many older lesbians. We've done the first ever research on the issue of being able to walk, but just not far, and being able to stand unsupported but only for brief times. HiddenMobilityDisabilities.com is filled with information. While we have analyzed an initial Survey data and published statistically significant results (see Research on the website), the Survey remains open for anyone willing to take it. Also, I have set up a non-profit Hidden Mobility Disabilities Alliance and would love to have interested people join."

These three women from the OLOHP recently died. They were loved, and we'll miss them.



Jannell Vander Grift
born 1953, died 2017
Interviewed in
Albuquerque, New
Mexico, April 2016

Due to her health, Jannell was interviewed earlier than most. This excerpt was her reply when asked about coming out to her family.

That didn't come until later. It just didn't. I think it was because there were some things I couldn't face myself. I think it's probably what all women, when they are coming out, sort of are afraid of. They are afraid of rejection. [Tearful] They are afraid that the people they have loved the most in the world are not going to love them anymore, or not love them the same.

Jannell explained to the interviewer:

I am not even sure I am a lesbian, but I am married to one. If that makes me one, so be it. I don't care. I love my wife.

Why couldn't I just say it [that I am a lesbian]? The truth was I didn't know if I was. In some ways, I think it would have been easier if I would have just said, "Yes." If I could have said, "Yes, I am. I have felt this way and struggled with this ever since I was little," maybe it would have been easier. I don't know, but I have feelings of shame, and I am mad that I have feelings of shame, really mad!

Annalee, talking about coming out to her students at the University of Minnesota:

Their reaction was wonderful. I told them hiding was something I could not do anymore. I kicked open the closet door forever! I was, of course, a little bit teary-eyed by the time I got through this and they all came up and hugged me and said it was just fine, and it was just great. And I was... you know... phew! It was like shedding something.

We were told that we were going to have our offices painted at the University, and we could actually choose the paint for one wall. Well, what they had was institutional choices, so I said to the painter one day, "If I bring in my own paint, will you put it on the wall?" He said, "We're not supposed to do that." I said, "I didn't ask if you were supposed to do it, I asked if you would." He said, "Well, yes, but don't tell anybody." So I brought in a big can of lavender paint and had one wall painted lavender. One of my colleagues stood outside the door that day and said, "Annalee, I think you're making a statement." And I said, "I just might be." I got away with it.

What are they going to do? It's already done. They were surprised, but if you don't know what to do, you leave it alone. That office stayed lavender long after I left! I think it's probably changed now, but when I would go back over as a retired professor, I remember one woman said, "Say, I have the lavender office now." She wasn't lesbian, but she was delighted to have it. That was kind of fun. The gay and lesbian students knew that was where they could stop if they needed help.



Annalee Stewart
born 1927, died 2017
Interviewed in
Minneapolis, MN
in 2002 and in 2011



Carrie Washburn
born 1942, died 2017
Interviewed in
Tacoma, WA, 2015

Carrie signed a conditional contract, asking that her interview transcript be used for research purposes only, so we are unable to share any excerpts from her story. Suffice it to say, her experiences and thoughts have added significantly to our collective history.

Featured at a Library: Our Stories, Our Voices

article submitted by Kathy Prezbindowski

University Place (Washington) Library was the site of our most recent offering of an OLOHP presentation--on Tuesday evening, May 16, 2017. I estimate that 50+ women and men were there--with median age probably 50+ too. A Pierce County librarian, and a woman from a local coming out support group, did admirable outreach work announcing the event to a wide variety of sites: libraries, senior centers, retirement communities, and the local newspaper.



OLOHP presenters introduced themselves while outlining the evolution of the Project. Included were two readers on the DVD: Aganita V. and Sue W., who joined Ellen K., Kathy K., Ruth B., and Kathy P. Mary H. was present but seated—with an iffy knee. We sent greetings to Gloria, an OLOHP interviewer, “with us in spirit in Gig Harbor.” As usual, Margaret Purcell was actively engaged on equipment.

We screened the first 40 min of our one-hour DVD: *Our Stories, Our Voices: the Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project*. This left time for live readings of additional Herstory excerpts selected by Margaret. Three audience volunteers (Sandy, Darleen, and the mom of a 25-yr-old Seattle lesbian) joined OLOHP readers.

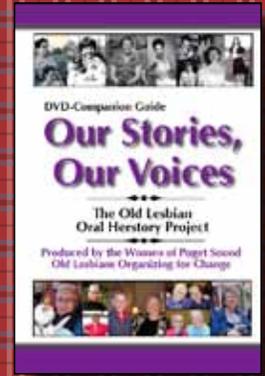
We invited questions and comments. Many voices chimed in: “I’ve never before sat in a room with so many lesbians!” A 20-something woman: “Sitting in a room of old lesbians lets me better imagine my own later years.” “We need more of this type of educational gathering!” “I agree...I’m a state congresswoman, here with my wife.” “I live in a condo right here by U. P. Library and I just walked over.” “Four of us drove over from the Olympic Peninsula to be here.” A Methodist minister expressed his thanks (and later his interest in having a similar event at his church). David Coon, Ph.D. (the University of Washington Tacoma co-producer/editor of the DVD) was there with six of his student film team.

After the event, we did tabling. Folks bought products, signed up to volunteer, be interviewed, or propose similar presentations...at another library, a Catholic school, for a women’s chorus retreat.

A wonderful evening! We thank the Pride Foundation (in Seattle) for their support. Let us know if you’d like to suggest another site for an Old Lesbian Oral Herstory presentation. Here in the Pacific Northwest, we already have two more in the works for September and others after that. It may very well be that the OLOHP has active volunteers who would be willing and able to arrange a presentation in your area.

My Herstory book arrived a few days ago. I am amazed at how beautifully you have assembled the narrative and photos into this document. It is precious to me, and is what I wanted and hoped would be of value to researchers in their quest to know and understand how it was (and still is) for us Old Lesbians. What a treasure you have given me, and I join the hundreds of others who are now pleased and privileged to have their story documented.

Jeanne H.



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*

** 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, for their ongoing support.

