

# The OLOHP Insider

#37... 4th Issue for 2017

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project



Above: Arden & Charlotte's home in Houston for more than 20 years.



Below: Arden & Charlotte's new residence in Houston, still in the neighborhood, and quite a view from the seventh floor.

Our new mailing address is  
777 N. Post Oak Rd Apt. 704  
Houston, Tx 77024



## *Arden's Musings*

It seems like we just sent an issue of *The Insider* out a few weeks ago, which we did. Hurricanes and flooding kept that issue from coming out when it should, but things have calmed down and we feel like our lives are getting back on track. As you know, Charlotte and I had to move from the house we'd lived in for more than 20 years. Downsizing from nine rooms with lots of storage to three rooms was no small feat for us at 87 and an 86 years old! As you can imagine, the physical move was a huge task, one we could never have done alone. But the emotional impact was large as well. Many of you have reached out to us, asking if you can help in any way, and wishing us well. We count ourselves as incredibly lucky women to have such an extensive support system at this stage in our lives.

We're now in a high-rise senior living building called The Forum at Memorial Woods. Like many similar facilities, there are various levels of care, and lots of amenities. We're still living independently and have a two-bedroom unit to accommodate the OLOHP office and guests. We still have a full kitchen and I knew things were getting back to normal when I was able to stop unpacking and cook a full meal for us. I'll miss the canning and freezing, but we are safe and comfortable. And Charlotte is busily charming and flirting with other residents... and we LOVE the valet parking!

It was a surprise to find out I may actually be a bit more of a tech user than others at The Forum. I've always felt like I barely know the difference between an app and an operating system! Working with Margaret in Washington, and interviewers and transcribers spread out all over, has made it a must that I can handle email, some basic word processing, do the occasional scan and such. Once we moved and I had time to set up my computer, I was incredibly frustrated. But it turned out the problem wasn't mine this time! It was the connections within the building. I once again employed my new mantra, "I get by with a little help from my friends," and they helped me get me up and running.

Thank you all for your kind thoughts and supportive words. They've made this year's changes all the more bearable. Charlotte and I recently went to San Antonio where I was able to get three new interviews for the Project – that tells me things are getting back to normal, and we're once more moving ahead.

Hope you enjoyed whatever holidays you celebrate.

*Arden*

*Please don't miss another article from Arden on page 3...*

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

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## Numbers Tell Us How Many – Words Remind Us Why

As we approach the end of another year in the OLOHP, we thought we'd update everyone on where things stand. We'll start with numbers. It has been an unusual year. Before, we would consistently have a handful of interviews conducted each month. In 2017, they came in spurts. We started with a very busy winter and spring, but it was followed by a quiet summer. For the first time in several years, we were able to pat ourselves on the back for getting caught up on the recordings waiting to be transcribed. Well, we should have held off on congratulating ourselves, because once fall arrived, it was like someone flipped a switch. There was even a recent day when five interviews came in on the same day. While this does mean we're scrambling to get all the new interviews processed, as far as we're concerned, that's a good thing – it means even more of these important stories have been gathered and they will be honored and preserved.

A few more interviews might be added as the year comes to a close, but as of today, we have gathered 87 new stories in 2017 (a record!), bringing the total number of interviews to 643. In our wildest dreams, we never expected the Project to have lasted as long or accomplished so much.

Now onto the words... The 87 new interviews brought us even more insights into the lives of these women. Here are a few examples:

*You had choices when you got out of high school. You could get married. You could be a secretary. You could be a teacher or a nurse, and that was about it.*

*When we first got together, we had no friends. She had friends at work but she was very careful – extremely careful – who she introduced me to. I tell everybody that when she started introducing me to those work friends, they all thought Gerri had a tiger by the tail. They knew that I wanted so much more than what I had. I had to be like normal people. So that's how we've lived our lives. We lived like normal married people.*

*I figured I was the only one on the planet.*

*I knew I was different. I would get crushes on girls, but there was never any talk about it you know. In the '50s, especially in the black community – no, no. Just no!*

*I told the order priest. There was no big reaction from him. I don't think he even said, "Go and sin no more." I knew that I wasn't going to go and sin no more. (laughing) I knew this was addictive. This wasn't going to end!*

*We were each invited to the same party by mutual friends. These people wanted to get us together, so we met at the party, and we never left. We got together at that party, and we've never been apart since.*

### A peek at where the women live that we have interviewed over the years...

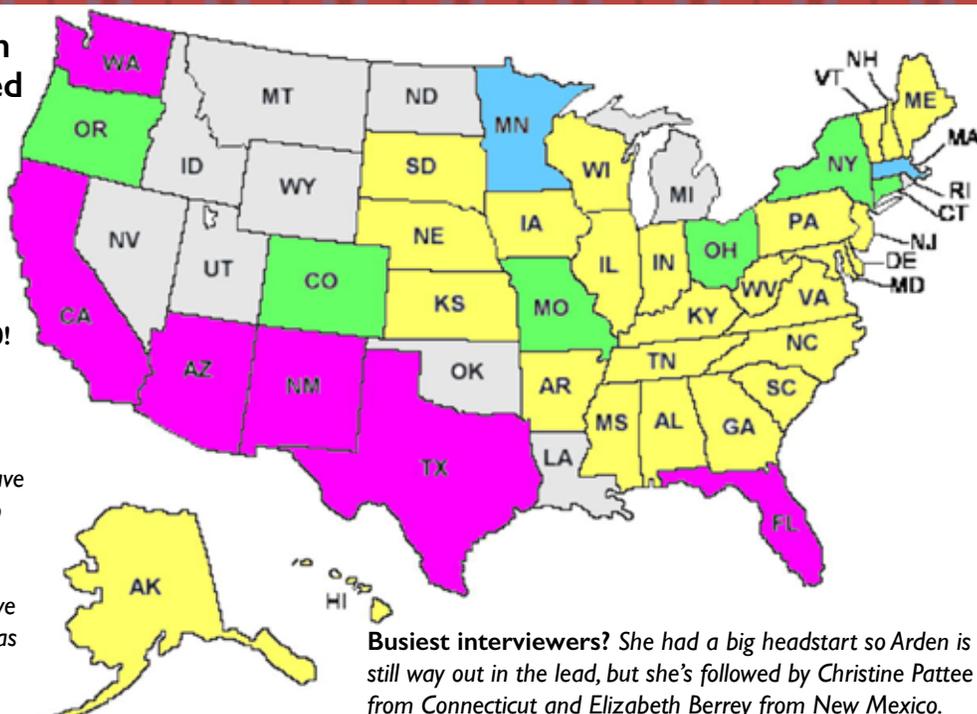
- gray = no interviews
- yellow = 1 to 10
- green = 11-20
- blue = 21-40
- magenta = more than 40!

#### State with the most interviews?

The Project has 78 from California women.

**Interviews from outside the US?** We have three from Australia, seven from Canada, two from Japan, and one from Costa Rica.

**Number of active interviewers?** We have around 35 active interviewers – some work as a team. Of those, 25 conducted one or more interview in 2017.



**Busiest interviewers?** She had a big headstart so Arden is still way out in the lead, but she's followed by Christine Pattee from Connecticut and Elizabeth Berrey from New Mexico.

## *What is The Opposite of Musing? Bristling?* by Arden

I've written a Musings piece for almost every *Insider*, using the space to share with you what is happening in my own life and in the Project. Since it appears on the first page, Musings sets the tone for the issue, so I try to avoid including anything negative there, or talking about challenges in the Project. But that doesn't mean I can't vent a bit here, since this article appears later in the Issue! So here goes...

What's the opposite of musing? Fuming is a bit strong, so maybe I'll go with bristling. I strongly feel a need to speak up for the Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project. Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC) has once again implied that the OLOHP belongs to them. In the latest issue of their E-Newsletter, one of their directors referred to the OLOHP as "an OLOC project."

This misconception has gone on for years. About 15 years ago, while Charlotte and I were serving on OLOC's Steering Committee, they offered to make a financial contribution to the Project with a fixed annual amount. OLOC continued to raise and pass along some funding for the Project for several years. Long after Charlotte and I had retired from the OLOC Steering Committee, I happened to attend an event where the OLOC Steering Committee was also meeting, and they suggested assigning someone from OLOC to oversee the OLOHP.

Confused as to why OLOC thought they should have oversight. I, not OLOC, had personally started the Project in 1998. They had never been part of the tons of work the Project requires, they didn't have access to any parts of the Project or its records, and they had never contributed more than a small portion of what it costs to keep the OLOHP going. They had been supportive, which we appreciated, and we publicly thanked them, but I didn't agree to someone overseeing our work.

By 2009, the OLOHP had expanded significantly, and that led us to incorporate the Project as a 501c3 non-profit organization. Because OLOC had been supportive, often sharing information about the OLOHP in its newsletter, and because we had interviewed and preserved the life stories of many OLOC members, we invited an OLOC SC member to sit on the OLOHP Board of Directors.

Over the years, we have had to make repeated efforts to get them to acknowledge the exact relationship between us. Margaret likes to explain it this way:

"Coca Cola is a sponsor of the Olympics, but Coca Cola sure doesn't think they own the Olympics!"

OLOC knows better and they have signed an agreement that specifically states we are separate entities. Yes, they're supportive. And yes, they have contributed in the past. But they do not own the Project. So why, once again, confuse the issue by referring to our effort as an "OLOC project"?

You can tell, I am beyond frustrated. I feel personally that OLOC's repeated mistatments unfairly take credit for 20 years of the work of many dedicated women, they mislead funders, they mislead OLOC's own members. OLOC's false statements are confusing to the over 600 women who have honored the Project by sharing their life stories with the us. The OLOHP is, and always has been, an independent effort that strives to:

- honor the lives of lesbians 70 and older
- ensure that their stories are in their own words
- broaden the understanding of what it was like for these women throughout their lives
- preserve their stories for future research

Thanks for letting me vent! If nothing else, it brought down my blood pressure.

## *Passings*

We'd like to share two excerpts from a woman in the Project who recently died. She asked that we not reveal her identity, but we appreciate her participation. We know she'll be missed.

*Once I met this woman, and I was attracted physically to her, I knew. But I wasn't sure about the physical thing. I thought maybe that's just her, and that's all there was to it or something. When I met my second love, I was very attracted to her physically. Then I knew that I was a lesbian.*

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*We met online and communicated for several months. Then we met in person in March, and in August, we were buying a house, and I backed out of it. The problem was, I thought I was really in love with her, and I soon came to wonder if she was in love with me. I didn't know. This was my first real lesbian relationship. I didn't know how it was supposed to be, and it turned out that she had never had either. She had had a lesbian relationship when she was in her 20s or so, with a woman her age who was not out. Otherwise she hadn't had any relationships. We were both kind of naive in many, many kinds of ways.*

## Why Give Presentations?

There are days, especially when we are working on various elements of a presentation we're about to do, that we ask ourselves that very same question! Why are we doing this?! We'll answer that a bit later, but first, here is how that process typically goes.

Where we do presentations varies considerably. This fall, we were asked to present at Texas A&M, both to a class of 70 students, and then again in a program open to everyone. Next up was a mixed group: men and women, young and old, straight and not-so-straight. Then two more groups wanted to hear from us, workers providing a wide variety of services to seniors – they wanted to learn more so they'd be more sensitive to the needs of their LGBT clients.

Once we've identified a place to do a presentation, we strive to customize it so that it will best address our understanding of who will be in the audience. We start off thinking, "This will be easy. We can use the same presentation we used last month and tweak it a bit." Next, we go on to prove the adage: Everything always takes longer than expected! We work on identifying excerpts that fit the audience, then the graphics to go along with the excerpts. Then we reach out to people to read the excerpts, print up scripts, pack up a bunch of brochures, handouts, and equipment, and head out the door, grumbling the whole way because we just devoted a week to something that will take only an hour.

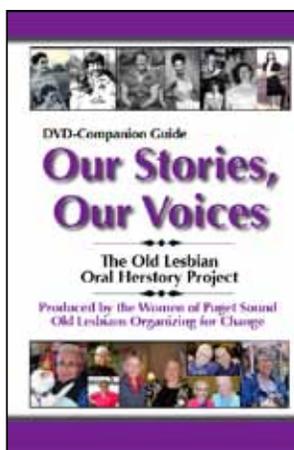
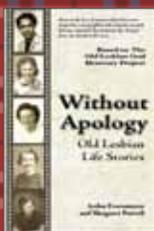
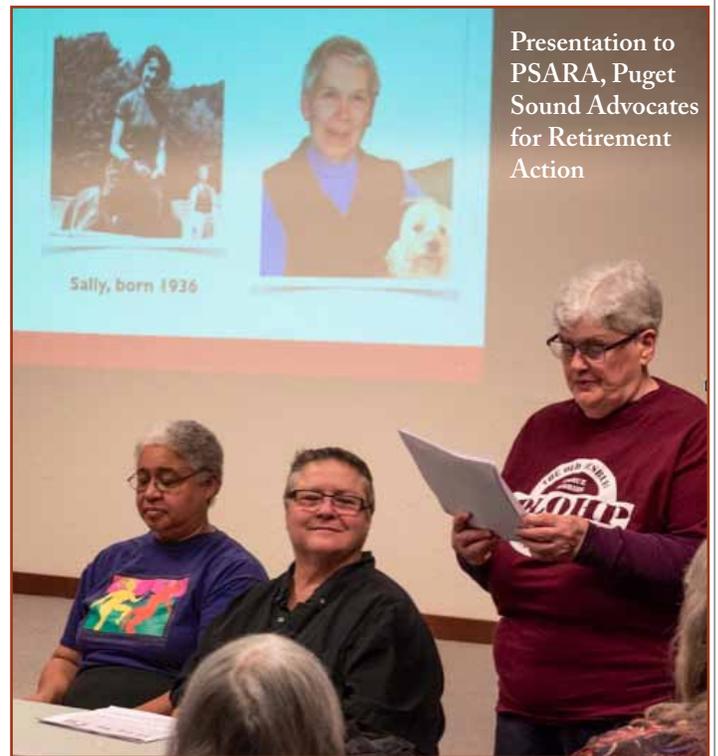
When we get there, haul our stuff in, meet the folks, set it all up, do our presentation, and chat with everyone, we remember why it is we do all this: It's fun and it's always rewarding. Sometimes a single comment made by an audience member is all it takes to send us looking for another place to present.



We'd like to share two examples of especially meaningful comments we heard this year.

At the presentation to the mixed crowd, we'd made sure we included several excerpts from women who had been married to men. After we were done, a man came up to Aganita and thanked her. He said he was on the other side of the equation. He never understood how his wife could have married him and then left him for a woman. He didn't know what she was going through. "Now I know."

At a presentation at a local library that was open to the public, a lesbian, maybe in her early 30s, offered that, until that night, she had never met any lesbians in their 50s, 60s or older. She wasn't sure where they went, and she had had no idea what her own future would look like. She was so glad she came. So were we!



## 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.