

The OLOHP Insider

#38... 1st Issue for 2018

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project



Three years old



Portrait at 19



At work on Go Texan Day, 1961



Charlotte in 2013

Losses and The OLOHP

These past few months have been more difficult than most. Our practice has been to let you know in *The Insider* when we learn that someone from the Project has died. It's been four months since our last issue – a longer interval than normal – but even taking that into account, there have been significantly more losses than usual. Given that we've been doing this work for almost 20 years, and that our focus is on women 70 and older, the losses aren't unexpected. That doesn't make it easier.

At the risk of sounding trite, our thoughts and prayers are with those dealing with these losses. We're very thankful that these women shared their stories with the Project and that their insights and experiences will be a part of our collective history.

Much of the space in this issue is devoted to the women who recently died. We will miss those who are gone, of course. But we won't forget them, and we're glad we had a chance to be a part of their lives.

Charlotte Avery, 1930-2018

(The photos above are all Charlotte.)

Charlotte passed away about two weeks ago. Whoever coined the term "one-of-a-kind" must have known her. As most of you know, she was Arden's "Sugar" for the past 30 years. Charlotte shared her story with the Project in September 2000, and while she was never an interviewer herself, Charlotte probably sat in on more interviews than anyone else. She was Arden's #1 Cheerleader, accompanying her to interviews, trainings, presentations and more.

Several years ago, Arden reflected on her life with Charlotte: *What is wonderful in Charlotte's and my relationship is that together we have been finding this activist path. Our sensibilities tend to be along the same lines. The primary attraction between Charlotte and me is on a spiritual level. The spiritual aspect was never present in all the years I was with Tommie. It's wonderful to have this. Not to discount other times of my life, but this period has involved more change in a faster period of time. Charlotte and I have done more in three years than lots of people do in a lifetime.*

Everyone who spent time with them could see the deep bond Charlotte and Arden had. Working with the Project, Arden often said she fell a little bit in love with each of the women she interviews. She once asked Charlotte if that was okay, to which Charlotte generously replied with a mischievous smile, "As long as you don't bring them home." It would have been easy for her to resent all of the time Arden devoted to the Project, but she didn't. Charlotte was an incredibly generous woman, one-of-a-kind, and she will be missed.

Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older

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OLOHP— An Interviewer’s Perspective, by Barb Kucharczyk

When Margaret asked if I was willing to write a small piece about the OLOHP, from my view as an interviewer, I jumped at the chance. Many of my friends and family know I do these “interviews;” the most-often asked question is: “Why?” – quickly followed by “that must be interesting!”

Interesting, for me, hardly describes “the event.” I called the interviews “events,” because they truly are, as Dictionary.com defines event: something that happens; an occurrence, especially one of some importance.

I’ve not interviewed a large number of women, yet each one found the OLOHP process significant and meaningful. Despite pre-interview emails and phone contact, having a person there with the interviewee to question, assure, and reassure, seemed important to each woman’s comfort level as she decided to join the unique sisterhood of OLOHP participants.

Some women confessed to terror, or trepidation, in anticipation of their interview. Others confessed relief – at last able to tell their story to a non-judgmental ear. Still others began their interviews by admitting their preparation was the first time they ever sat and thought about their entire life, much less actually spoke to someone about it.

A majority of the women I’ve interviewed were concerned that their life stories were really not “worth” being recorded. One woman asked if she

“qualified” to do a Herstory because her life, as an out lesbian, was all good: jobs, associations, business, and family relationships, all good. She had no negative experiences living openly as a lesbian. Every woman’s life is worthy. Every woman’s life is important. Every woman’s life deserves an opportunity to be told, recorded, remembered.

I am privileged to have the best job in the entire Herstory-gathering process. While interviewing, I was serenaded by an award winning Blues singer-songwriter – all the while wondering how the transcriptionist would handle guitar-playing and singing on the recording. I celebrated 64 years together with a Pennsylvania couple. I’m continually learning many new and varied things: how to build an earthen shelter home; the metaphysical relationships between the Jewish and Buddhist faiths; how to write a play; and a little about inner workings of a Catholic convent, to name a few.

I am honored to spend time with each woman, to share her fears and try to help put them aside. Honored to be the nonjudgmental ear, to support the relief of telling one’s truths. Honored to see, or hear, or read the smiles and exclamations when a women’s Herstory is delivered. Honored to share the laughter and tears; to learn lessons of life, faith, and love.

Thank you, Arden, for giving me the Honor of being and OLOHP interviewer.

Barbara A. Kucharczyk



There is **NO**
elevator to
SUCCESS.

You have
to take the
STAIRS.

Update on Our Indexing and Abstract-Writing Efforts

Slowly, we are working our way thru the hundreds of transcripts in the OLOHP collection, doing our best to create our version of an index for each Herstory. We knew that this would be a significant undertaking and expected it would take us at least a year or two... we were right on both counts, and we’re okay with that. One step at a time and we’ll get there eventually!

Our goal is to create an index that will enable us to more easily identify who worked as professional Girl Scouts, who had never heard the word lesbian until after they became aware of their own sexuality, who ran into trouble in the military because they were (or were thought to be) lesbians, who read the book *The Well of Loneliness*, who was a PE teacher, and much more.

Arden and Margaret are doing all those with restricted contracts, but that still leaves plenty to share. We could still use more help! There are lots more to index (we provide a form to follow) and lots more abstracts to write. It’s a great opportunity to be able to read some of the Herstories. Contact us!

We have learned that these women who shared their stories or worked with the OLOHP have died. They were loved, and we'll miss them.

**Marcia Perlstein, born 1945
Resided in Port Townsend, Washington
Interviewed by Arden in March 2009**

Marcia was an interviewer and ardent supporter of the OLOHP!



The OLOHP provides me with the opportunity to unite my past with the present by being in conversation, in each interview, with our rich collection of personalities and as their fan. It enables every interviewer to represent the rest of us in helping to share ourselves with each other. The experience has been transformative and has enriched my life immeasurably. 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.



**Anna Menz, born 1944
Resided in St. Petersburg, Florida
Interviewed by Edie Daly in 2016**

I think I sort of knew in high school, but I didn't know what to do about it. I didn't do anything, except that I tried to hug women every now and then. I would pretend I was crying or something, just to hug a woman!

**Margaret Mann, born 1945
Resided in Honolulu, Hawaii
Interviewed by Sherry Fulton
in May 2014**



Taken from an email she had delivered after her death: *If you are reading this I have now departed this life, happily and just the way I wanted. Imagine this... me leaping out of my wheelchair, dancing around, bounding into the air and floating up out of sight. It has been a rough 20 years and I am so glad to give it up. What I don't like is leaving is you all behind...I have been so well loved.*



**Gladys Lopez, born 1945
Resided in Thornton, Colorado
Interviewed by Katherine Wood
in February 2016**

My feelings were getting more intense for women. And I'm realizing that there's something... something weird here. I found an ad in a magazine or a newspaper and I wrote to this person. And here's how freaked out I was about all this. I rented a P.O. Box because I didn't want that mail coming to my house. Now the only person that had a key to the mailbox was me.

But the post person might see it, right? And so, when I got the first letter, I sat in my car, read it, and cried. I said, "Oh my God, there's somebody else like me!" I just couldn't believe it.

**Stephanie McClain, born 1938
Resided in Houston, Texas
Interviewed by Arden in June 2014**



I went to Christian College in Columbia, Missouri, which is a junior girls school. Probably, deep in my heart, I knew I was a lesbian, but I don't think that I knew what it was or what to do about it. When I look back on it, there were probably so many signs. I remember being in high school and finding Ann Bannon [Beebo Brinker] books in the drugstore and I'd lay out in the backyard on a quilt and read these books and hide them from my mother. I knew enough that this was not something that you just put out for everyone. I don't think I understood them. I was so naive that I'd think Beebo sort of scared me.

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**Jody Ellis, born 1925
Santa Fe, New Mexico**

**Interviewed by
Elizabeth Berrey in April 2016**



My grandmother said I used to wear my coveralls and overalls. I loved my overalls so! She said you're never going to be a little girl. So I knew right then that I was a little boy. I don't know how to explain it, but... I don't know. I don't know what to say, actually, except that I've never been much of a little girl.

**Sandy Robillard, born 1933
Transcriber early in
the Project**



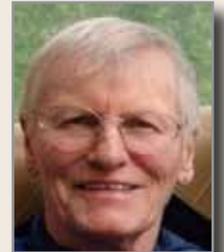
**Barbara Stafford, born 1937
Resided in Yarmouth, Massachusetts
Interviewed by Arden in May 2010**

When I got married, I was going to prove that I wasn't [a lesbian]. I was 22, 23 when I met Sigrid. But then I was dating men for a while after that. I really was [a lesbian]. But nothing -- nothing evolved. I always tried to find that Polish doctor my mother said I should marry.



**Karlene Faith, born 1938
Resided in Vancouver,
British Columbia
Interviewed by Arden in
September 2012**

**Ethel 'Kim' Hayes, born 1931
Resided in Santa Rosa, California
Interviewed in Ft. Bragg, CA
in 2008 by Ida VSW Red**



One of the ladies in the Army must have suspected something about my personality, something that I did not know. We came home from one of the games and there was a knock on my door. It was an army friend, Cathy the cook. She said, "Kim, I have this book -- it's about women from Paris and it's in English. I want you to read it. I'm going to lock the door and then come back to find out what you thought about it." I wondered what this was all about. After reading the book I learned it was about women loving women in sexual relationships. I had no idea this was part of life. I wasn't aware that somebody thought that I was like these woman.

I was fearful because of my job and how the investigators operated. They were very sneaky, planting spies to tell more about any happenings in the barracks or whatever they could see with any two women. Periodically, they came though the barracks when we were working. They checked the cubicles looking for evidence like letters or pictures. They hoped to accuse us of being homosexuals whether it was direct or just by association.

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+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.

