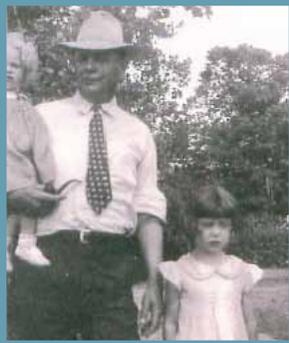


The OLOHP Insider

May 2012

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

Issue 14



Fathers Day is Coming Up Soon

Arden's Musings

A couple of years ago, I had decided to start cutting back on the number of long trips Charlotte and I made each year. In 2010, it was seven trips, and in 2011, it was five trips. As plans stand right now, this year it will be three. While we might have cut back anyway, it has been heartening to have several other interviewers contributing enough stories to keep me about as busy as I can be! That's not to say I won't jump on the right opportunity if it presents itself... I'd love to get back to the San Francisco area where there are lots of stories just waiting to be told.

Our favorite mode of travel has always been in our motor home, and now that has become less appealing because of the price of gas. However, this year, in March, we started our travels with our third motor home trip to Florida. Most of the time we parked in driveways and back yards – a great way to get to know the women I interview a bit better.

In addition to meeting new women and gathering more stories in Florida, another reward of the trip was having the opportunity to spend time with friends along the way: Rainbow in St. Augustine – an old pal; Jackie and Edie in Gulfport who have their stories in "Book 2"; Shewolf in Melrose, who was celebrating her 80th birthday while we were there. I also trained an interviewer while in Tallahassee.

And a special thanks to Suzanne Noe (aka Pro-Suzy), who put together a book signing event in St. Pete's. Added to the eight new women in my life who shared their life stories, we are talking another remarkable trip.

While with Jackie Mirkin and Edie Daly in Gulfport, they told of their idea of doing an event in conjunction with the OLOC Gathering in Boston this summer. J&E summer in Northampton, MA, the home of Smith College and the Sophia Smith Collection, which, as you probably already know, is the permanent archive/home for the Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project. Along with Christine Pattee who lives in that area, Edie and Jackie will host an event at Smith College for the Oral Herstory Project the day before the OLOC Gathering starts. It will be an opportunity to see some of the stories already archived, and see the wonderful building the archive is housed in. It is an easy drive to Boston, as well as an opportunity for women who live in the area to see the collection.

Our second trip this year will be to the National Women's Music Festival in Madison, WI in June/July. Margaret and Mary will be there and we will do a workshop, some interviewing, and sell a few books... Never let an opportunity pass you by!

Arden, born 1931

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

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My Name Is Margaret and I'm An Addict

I've written in an earlier issue about my experiences transcribing interviews, but I feel a need to share more... I may have to enter a twelve step program because I've crossed over some unseen threshold. Transcribing is no longer one of my passions, it is clearly now an addiction.

I used to fit in a transcription or two when I had time, or when we were getting too far behind. I'd always loved reading the transcripts, but hearing the women tell their stories took it to a whole other level. And not just to listen, but to take the time needed to put those words on paper stepped up the experience again.

This past month, I've had to admit transcribing isn't something I just want to "fit in" every now and then. I love it. I love hearing the voices, sharing in their stories, and love, love, love how much I learn while working on the transcriptions. This past few weeks, transcribing has led me to stop and learn more about vitrolite, myelin sheaths, Angelman's syndrome, labor Zionism, Grossinger's Catskill Resort and... you're not going to believe this one... squirrels with "wolves" in their necks!

But once I start working on a woman's story, I find it hard to stop. After a rather stressful winter, Mary and I had a chance to take a cruise to Alaska and we jumped on it. It was fun, new, restful and filled with breathtaking scenery, but what do I keep thinking about? I had been in the midst of a transcription when I had to stop to pack for the cruise. It took me two or three days to stop wondering what was going to happen to Madge next, and if she finally dated that woman.

So I had a stern discussion with myself about keeping my priorities straight and pledged to do better. But then I got back home, and no sooner was I unpacked and caught up with emails, and I'm back at it, pecking away at the keyboard. I finished up Madge, loving every minute of it, went directly on to Judy, loving it as well, and started immediately on Joyce's story.

Even though it's not always readily apparent, I do have a life beyond the OLOHP. We had invited a group of women to come play cards and games at our house, and, when the first guests arrived a bit early, I still had my headphones on and my fingers were busily striking the keys... aarrgghhhh! How dare they come early! I just need a few more minutes to get to the end of the story Joyce was telling through my headphones. Joyce had just been arrested and was being thrown in jail, so I, reluctantly, put her on hold. Cards and games was fun. All of us laughed and played for hours, but it went so late, I couldn't get back to the story that night. Bummer!

Then I had a picnic to go to the next day... still no time to get back to Joyce. When I realized I was almost twitchy at the picnic, worrying about Joyce in jail, I had to admit to myself that I had a problem. I could just see it... next thing you know, I'll be standing up in front of a group and saying, "Hello. My name is Margaret, and I'm an addict."

I have yet to figure out what will come next. I do know, however, that I have no plans of going cold turkey! And for those of you as curious as I am, Joyce is no longer languishing in jail!

Editing: Another Interesting Aspect of the OLOHP

The OLOHP certainly isn't the only effort to focus on oral interviews, but we are one of the few who guarantees participants an opportunity to read their transcript once it is completed, and make changes. We've done it this way since day one and feel it is essential to the success of the Project. Many of the women who have agreed to share their stories have done so because they know, if they misspeak, can't recall a name at the moment, or decide they really shouldn't have told that story, they'll have the opportunity to edit the transcript before their herstory is finalized. This extra option takes some of the pressure off the storyteller. This has been especially helpful since we are gathering the stories of women who may have spent the majority of their lives hiding this important aspect of who they are, hiding to protect themselves. Knowing they'll have a chance to edit later helps them feel they can talk freely. And, not that it can't happen to someone in their 20s or 30s, but when you get into your 70s and 80s, sometimes bringing a name or place to mind can be quite the challenge! One of the most common phrases in our transcripts is, "I know that will come to me later!" Again, having the option to fill that blank later is helpful. And, on an even more basic level, editing gives the storyteller a chance to correct typos, misspelled words, or clarify something that was totally misunderstood by the transcriber! The only drawback to this process has been making the women involved resist the impulse to rewrite and reorganize the interview. Keeping the flavor and style of an oral transcript is important to us, too.

Excerpts from a few of the herstories...

I went to a horse camp when I was about 12 years old I guess. Twelve or 13. I already knew how to ride because of the pony. I was a pretty good rider. And fell madly in love with a counselor. Ah, first time. And I couldn't understand it, of course, but I just loved her dearly. I hated, I liked writing poetry and I liked writing, but still today I cannot draw a stick man. But, by golly, I took her art class and she took us out for sketching, out into the ...

I was smitten right off. And she was very kind. I'm sure she realized I'm a budding lesbian but she treated me very kindly, snuggled me a little bit to make me feel good and that I wasn't wrong, there wasn't anything wrong, and wrote me some nice notes and saw me at a reunion, but never did anything else except be kind. So I appreciated that treatment.



Maryline "Whitie" White
born March 1921
interviewed at age 90
in Oregon in 2011

Ann Marevis
born June 1934
interviewed at age 75
in Alabama in 2010
Died 2011

I should have known a lot earlier, but it was 1983. 'Cuz I had had crushes on my friends for a number of years in high school and college, real heart-wrenching crushes. And then I had a dry spell with nothing like that, with no feelings for anyone. Then I was watching an opera on TV and this soprano was singing and I just flipped. I thought, "Hmm, I thought all that was over." And the realization just grew inside me. Nobody brought me out or anything. It just... that triggered me feeling it... the inner knowledge that this is where I belong. And once I looked in the mirror and said, "I'm a lesbian," I felt ten feet tall. That was it.

When I was, you know, maybe still in grade school or first years of high school, I remember feeling an attachment to one of my aunts and to one of mother's friends in the church named Pearl. I would write in my diary about her and she smiled at me today or whatever. And then when they moved to Ocoola, Missouri, had an English teacher, Miss Lyons. And oh, did I ever fall for Miss Lyons. [I had] a terrible crush on her. And she kind of reciprocated back to me. She was single, she had a boyfriend that came over and visited her, but she was very affectionate and I was starved for affection.

I couldn't really feel it with my parents, so, sometimes in looking back on this, or maybe at the time, I just thought "I'm searching for a substitute mother." But oh yes, there were sexual overtones in how I felt about her and her body and how I so much longed for the hugs and so forth that she gave me. And I didn't know what was wrong with me. I never told anybody else about those feelings because I didn't think anybody else would feel that way. At that time I never heard of homosexuality.



Sue Pratt
born January 1936
interviewed at age 71
in Missouri in 2007

Recent Passings

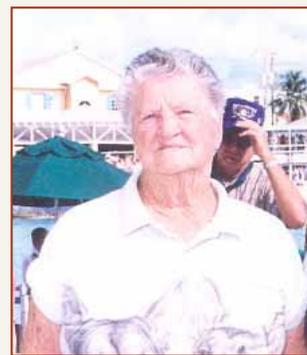
Losing women who have shared their story with the Project is inevitable, of course. These three women have recently died, leaving behind friends, families and their Herstories. They will be missed.



Margaret Davidson
born April 1918
interviewed 2010
died October 2011



Nancy Osborne
born March 1936
interviewed 2006
died October 2011



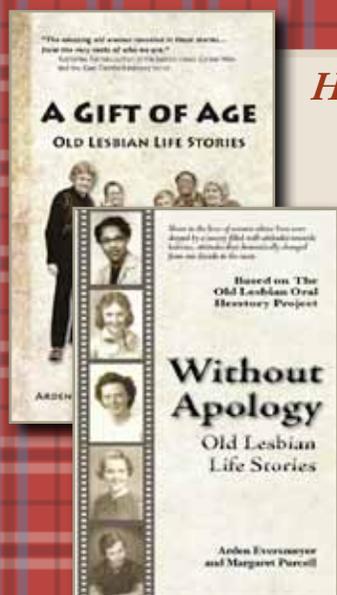
Bessie Morris
born July 1924
interviewed 2005
died November 2011

I'm only on page 42 and I'm so engaged and effected. I've been amused, confused, surprised, inspired, moved, and starting to get philosophical. Based on my reactions so far and my strong urge to share them, I think that these stories would be something wonderful to read and discuss with others (book club style).

Rachel

An OLOHP Event at Smith!

Mark your calendars and plan to visit the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts on Wednesday, July 18, 2012. In addition to seeing the archives filled with women's history, there will be opportunities for you to view some of the stories in the OLOHP collection. For more details, contact Jackie at jmirkin@tampabay.rr.com or Edie at EDFeather@gmail.com



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 our books. **

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 and Without Apology: 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 on page 1) or going to our website and using the PayPal/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.*