

The OLOHP Insider

August 2013

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

Issue 20



Arden's Musings

What a summer this has turned out to be - busy beyond belief. Or maybe I've slowed down a bit?

Charlotte and I had our annual fix of music festivals starting with National in Madison, WI. We have done this one for many years now, and it continues to nourish us. But you know me...it couldn't be all play and no work, and we managed to slip in another OLOHP workshop at the Madison festival. Each year, we see old friends, and make some new ones. After all these years, I'm always surprised to fall in love with a new performer, someone who has been around for years but unknown to me. And we love seeing the new talent, too.

Then we made our second visit to the Vancouver Folk Music Festival. Awesome doesn't begin to describe it - seven performing stages going all day, 65 performing groups invited from around the world, and 30,000 in attendance on Saturday. Outdoors, beautiful weather, orderly - idyllic.

In between festivals, I made a trip to Ashland, Oregon, to do some more interviews. There, I collected three new stories, and made a side trip to visit Jean Mountaingrove who will be 88 this fall. She'd shared her story with the Project ten years ago. This was my second trip to Ashland, so there is a nice group of friends developing.

That was all fun, but the exciting part of our trip was doing a presentation for Microsoft in Seattle. This was made possible through my gay cousin who is pals with the Microsoft executive in charge of GLBT events worldwide. Six of us did a presentation, which was sent live to all the Microsoft campuses around the world, followed by Q&A. Since we were all rehearsed and ready, we then went home and recreated and recorded the same presentation without any time constraints to use in the future for the *Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project*. It was an adventure, fun, and well received and we hope for future interactions with Microsoft.

After all that, we headed home to catch up with the business of our upcoming conference, *Celebrating Our Lesbian Legacies*, Oct. 10-13, in Houston. (It's not too late to register!) My email had been nearly non-functional for a month, and my new computer was a mess, but Mary, of M&M, made a rescue trip to get me moving again, and the stress level is ebbing. What would we do without geeks?

Arden, born 1931

Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older

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To Be Filed Under the Header “Be Careful What You Wish For”

Old proverbs become old proverbs because they're so often right, and that sure was true in this case. We had been working on a couple of new ideas on how to increase public awareness of the work being done by the Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project when we became aware of two intriguing opportunities. Arden just told you on the first page about one at Microsoft. We'd like to tell you about the other one, as well.

Two women in Seattle, Erin Bailey and Nicole Robert, have been developing a project called *Queering the Museum*. You can read all about it at queeringthemuseum.org. QTM believes “that museums have a responsibility to account for the role played in constructing normalized ideas of race, gender and sexuality.” QTM is working to help make that happen. Erin and Nicole made a point of reaching out to the LGBTQ community and specifically asked for input from local old lesbians.

QTM's first event was a symposium held at the *Museum of History and Industry*, where they are working to later stage an exhibition. Members of the local Puget Sound OLOC chapter took advantage of an audience and microphones being offered and did a staged reading of relevant material gleaned from the herstories in the OLOHP.

Gloria Stancich, who shared her own herstory with the OLOHP in 2005, took the lead in customizing a script that shared quotes, and sometimes longer stories, taken directly from various women's transcripts in the Project. Six readers (Sue, Kathy, Deirdre, Aganita, Lin and Jolly Sue) and a narrator (Casey) all volunteered, getting together to rehearse and even braving the infamous construction traffic happening in Seattle on that weekend.

The event was a huge success as far as the OLOHP was concerned. Not only were we able to share about some of the challenges, and triumphs, of lesbians born in the early 1900s, but we did it in front of a diverse audience, got an overwhelming reception, and tons of feedback.

The PS OLOC women were so jazzed by the whole experience, they've been working on developing a plan for “taking the show on the road,” offering to do presentation to schools, organizations, businesses, care providers, and care facilities.

While reaching out in this manner to share the wealth of information gathered and documented by the OLOHP wasn't part of the plan, it did answer one of our wishes, to play a significant role in making sure the life stories of these fascinating old lesbians is told, and retold, in their very own words.

THE OLD LESBIAN ORAL HERSTORY PROJECT



VERA MARTIN



ERIS DREYKUS



KITTU RIDDLE



BESSIE MORRIS



BEV TODD



RUTH SILVER

GATHERING STORIES OF LESBIANS BORN IN THE EARLY 1900s



LOUISE CASON



VIOLET NESSLER



BARBARA KALISH

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One of the banners used for the event depicting some of the women whose words were spoken in the staged reading.

Excerpts from Charlotte Doclar's Herstory

N = narrator, Charlotte Doclar, I = interviewer

N: I grew up in a Catholic school setting. I was a band member and a Girl Scout. I was a senior in high school and didn't know what I was going to do with my life. I had thought about the telephone company, and you know, that kind of thing. That's what girls thought about in those days.

I: That was one of the few things you could do.

N: Nursing, the telephone company, and teaching.

I: And secretary.

N: Oh, yeah. Sure. I was so slow in school that they put me in the secretarial track. I got to fold a lot of letters, and stuff envelopes. I was supposed to learn how to type. I know how to type now, but didn't in those days.

So I started thinking about becoming a nun, but I wasn't a devout Catholic. I didn't go to church everyday. I only went on Sundays, and only because my mama pushed me to church. When I got to be a senior I thought, "Now what am I going to do?"

Now by that time I thought that I... I knew that I loved women by that time. Not that I loved them in a physical way, because that only came much later, but, I always had girlfriends. I had a big crush on my PE Teacher, who is now in the convent! We all had a crush on our band director, that kind of thing. I know their names after all these years. I always hung around with girls.

There was a friend of mine and she and I... we would go down in the basement and play games. They were those kind of games where you really were kind of getting a little thing, a little kind of buzz, but we didn't know what it was. We would make up stories to tell each other. But it was only just the two of us. And I don't know why somebody didn't suspect something. There was no nakedness or anything. We just played games. But there was that kind of a feeling. I knew I didn't like guys and I didn't want to really get married. There was no way that I was going to marry.

I think I had a happy childhood. I didn't... I don't remember if I didn't. I was a loner. I knew that. I didn't have many friends at all. I don't know why that was. I look back sometimes and wonder. I remember playing by myself a lot. I remember playing on the railroad tracks, but I was alone. There was nobody with me. And one good friend, a close friend...

I: A girl.

N: Oh, definitely a girl, no boys. I always played the daddy when we played house, I was always the father bringing home the crepe myrtle blossoms so they could make this stew, or whatever.



*Charlotte Doclar
born April 1934
interviewed at age 69
died 2012
pictured at age 29*

I just didn't have many friends. I tried. I was in the band. So I had that experience. And I was in the Girl Scouts. I had those kind of social outlets. I wasn't athletic. I was tall and gangly and whatever, but I wanted to participate, so I would be the timekeeper, or I would get the uniforms, and I would throw out the basketballs.

I: Okay, you finished high school in New Orleans.

N: In New Orleans. And talked myself into entering the convent. And again, there were five of us the year I entered. It helped me through that. I loved my mother intensely and we were close. I slept with her every Saturday night, and even when I was a teenager, when my daddy would go play cards. The ritual was my mom and I would lie in bed and she would read me the comics,

and then we would do a little huggin' and, you know, kissin', then I would go to sleep and she would read the rest of the paper. But that was every Saturday night for as long as I can remember. So when I had to leave her. It was hard on her too.

I: Did she encourage you to go into the convent?

N: She encouraged me not because she wanted to, but she was afraid something was going to happen. My mother was a very superstitious woman. God punishing you was a big thing.

I: It's a hard way to live, isn't it?

N: Oh, God, yes it was. She wanted to be in the church, and thank God, her first husband died in 1962, so she got to come back to the church, received the sacraments.

I: So you were eighteen then when you entered the convent?

N: I was eighteen.

N: I was forty-seven when I left. At that time my relationships were getting more and more heavy,. Then I met some lesbians outside of the convent. And when I met people outside of the convent, I realized that I was really not being honest with who I was, and I was just using the convent as a facade. Towards the end, when I was thinking about leaving, I did all my homework. I did a thirty-day retreat. Kept my mouth shut for thirty days in Grand Couteau, Louisiana, which was gorgeous. It was like a vacation.

But then I went to a school, Sister of Notre Dame. It was like a retreat for three months, and you go there to renew and go through seminars. People would come down and talk to us. Of course, I found two women there. That's when I decided to...

No. I decided to leave the convent after I went up to Washington D.C. I was up there for a year working in *A New Way Ministry*, which was a gay Catholic ministry.

But I just wanted to be, to live the life, and knew I couldn't do it in the convent.

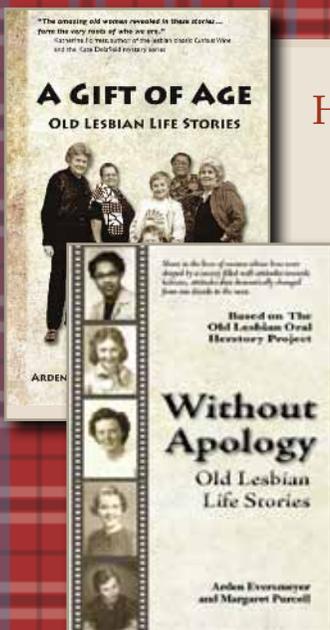
I: So did you declare yourself to leave the convent?

N: Oh yeah. I declared... they knew I was a lesbian. And the powers that be knew I was a lesbian. I didn't have a big struggle with the power structure. They accepted me for what I was, and, in fact, they were very generous. They gave me a sabbatical, a year of doing nothing, in order for me to determine whether I wanted to leave, which was unheard of in those days. And that's why I went to Sweemon and wrote my thesis and graduated from TWU, with my Masters Degree. But they were great...

I: Where did you do your masters work?

N: Texas Women's University. I figured I wasn't going to play the game anymore. I was, 47 years old, had never made a decision on my own. Can I do it, or can't I do it? What made me a lesbian? I knew I was a lesbian because I remember the first day I said the word. I was lying on the floor in the lap of some young sister, and we were listening to some kind of music and I remember saying, "I think I'm a lesbian." And that word, I had the hardest time with that word coming out, and then after that, once I declared myself, then it became very hard to be living in the community at the same time.

You can read more of Charlotte Doclar's story in *A Gift of Age: Old Lesbian Life Stories*, available at Alibris Books (www.alibris.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 currently be ordered at www.alibris.com

** 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.

A special thanks to OLOC, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, www.oloc.org, for their ongoing support.