

The OLOHP Insider

August 2010

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

Issue 5



Musings from Arden

It seems timely to share with you our most recent trip, which was almost a month on the road. For many years Charlotte and I have attended the National Women's Music Festival, now located in Madison, WI. This was the 35th anniversary for this event, making it the longest-running women's music festival in the country. It would be great to see more of you there next year. We love the music, but the connection with women is what draws us. It has been a gold mine of women who are now a part of the OLOHP.

This year Margaret Purcell (co-author) and Mary Henry (web mistress) joined us. And for the first time Margaret and I were able to do a workshop together. We also shared a book table in the market place with Alix Dobkin and Sonia Johnson, each with a new book of their own. A fun few days.

With almost a week's time between the festival and the OLOC National Gathering in Cleveland, Charlotte and I drove to Upper Michigan (UP) for some sight-seeing. It had been over 30 years since I had been there, and the first time for Charlotte. We visited Painted Rocks National Lakeshore, Sault Ste Marie (Soo Locks), and Mackinac Island. Some rain and fog, but a perfect day for the Mackinac Island trip.

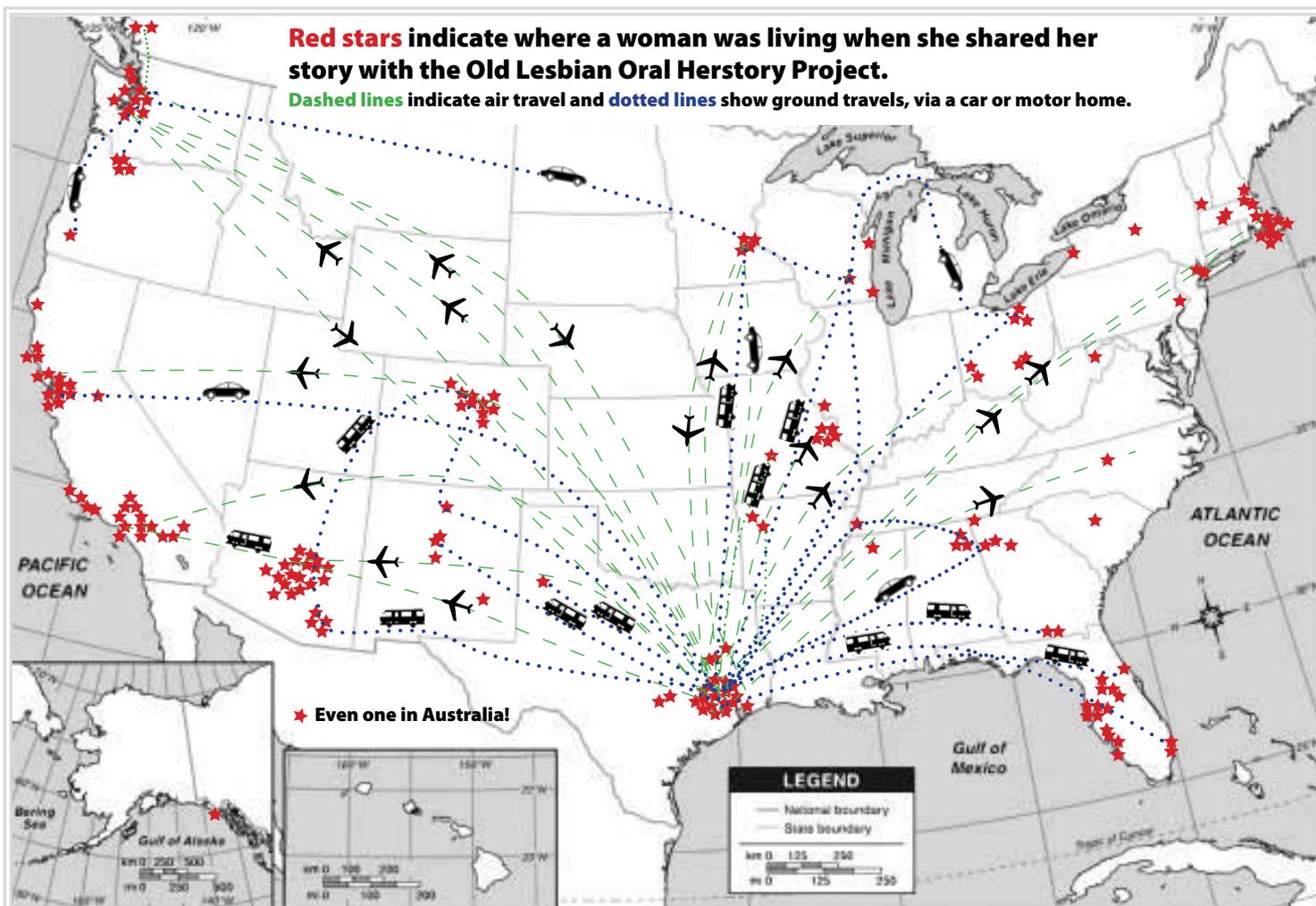
We were in Cleveland a week for the OLOC Gathering. It is always fun to see old friends, and meet new ones. I had appointments for interviews, but also had several impromptu interviews. I came home with ten new life stories, one of them from a woman who lives in Australia. Two of the new women are training to become interviewers. There was a book signing event there, too, that included Alix Dobkin, Sonia Johnson, Peg Cruikshank, Sheila Ortiz-Taylor, and myself. Even without a bookseller there were good books to buy.

It's good to be home for a while. A lot of work behind this trip, and getting ready for our next adventure in October. Our work continues.

Arden, born 1931

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

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A Look at the Numbers

Every once and a while, we stop and look at the numbers and see the big picture. Even though it sometimes feels like we eat, sleep, and breath the OLOHP, even we are surprised and a bit impressed. So we thought we'd share some of the numbers. The map above represents most of the stories and larger trips taken on behalf of the Project, either collecting stories or doing presentations. There are a few stars without any trip nearby. In those cases, the women shared their stories while at an OLOC Gathering or another event away from home.

The earliest birth year of an interviewee	1916
Women who were born before 1920	10
Interviewees born in the 1920s	55
Those born in the early 1930s	73
The ones born in the late 1930s	46
Arden's age when she started the Project. (She worked on 3 stories that year.)	66
Arden's current age. (She has done 24 new interviews so far in 2010)	79
Years spent working on the project	13
Women in the Project born before World War II began	97%
Number of emails in the last 2 ½ years between Arden and Margaret	1432

The Importance of the Herstories *Priceless*

Excerpts from a few of the Herstories

Care DeLeeuw Born October 1930

From her Interview
in January 2003



1966



1999

I = Interviewer, Arden C = Care

I: Are you out to your family?

C: Oh, yes. I talked to my mother when I was 20 or so. My father... never mentioned... never, ever mentioned anything. I think he probably subconsciously knew, but he didn't want to know. And I'm out to all my family. I have been for a long time. My sister was a little upset when I finally confronted her with it. She doesn't really want to communicate at all about it, but she loves me anyway, I guess.

I: As long as you don't discuss it?

C: Yes. But all my nieces and nephews... if they don't know, it's not because I haven't been free with the information. See, my family knew back in the '70s. My brother and I went to water ski and my brother and sister-in-law said to my partner, "Well, we know you are lesbians and we love you just the same." I thought, "Oh, my god." The kids are ten or twelve or something and they said it was just fine with them. So it's never been an issue.

I: Do you know if there are any other gay or lesbian people in your family?

C: I don't think so. I just thought my aunt was, probably, a lesbian. I thought for a while my mother probably should have been, but she wasn't brought up in an era where that was a possibility.

Excerpts from a few of the Herstories

When asked if she has always thought of herself as a lesbian rather than a gay woman...

Definitely. I always have. I never, ever... Actually, no. The first half a year I knew her, we were still in our jobs and we were still kind of closeted. We didn't know anybody else. At that point, I thought I was bisexual. I really thought that it wasn't who she was and her sexuality, it was that I loved her. I thought that I could love anybody. And so I thought that I would probably call myself bisexual, although I don't know that I was truly aware of what that might be.

I knew that I always loved women. And this finally felt like coming home. This was a place where I was finally able to figure out: "Yes. This is what it is." And so within that year, I changed from, "I can love anybody" into "I love women." And that made me know that I was a lesbian.

Edie Daly Born January 1937

From her Interview
in January 2004



1948



1995

Gerry Cooper Born December 1924

From her Interview
in March 2006



1941

I = Interviewer, Arden G = Gerry

G: There was one word — Queer. The first time I heard the word “gay,” it was in a joke that said, “Is so-and-so gay? Well, I think he’s happy!” But I didn’t hear the word gay until I came to Houston. I didn’t know any gay people. If there were any, I didn’t know it. I have pictures of me very young in short pants with another girl. So I guess I knew that I was different. I had some serious affairs of the heart; one with my babysitter. I was crazy about her. My first very serious affair was with a girl I grew up with. Things go hot and heavy when we were in high school. I got her to marry my cousin.

I: Kept her in the family, huh?

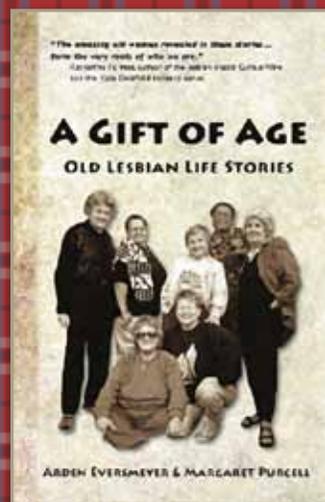
G: Uh-huh. Had to talk her into a whole lot. I was really smitten. And she was too.

I: Was there ever any discussion about staying together or trying to put a name to the way you felt?

G: No. I was just different.

I: Did the kids in school ever call you names?

G: No. I didn’t have any trouble like that ever, growing up. I did not wear dresses and I had men’s jobs. But remember, that was war time and it was acceptable. My grandma did not want me to wear coveralls when I was growing up. However, since I climbed every tree in the county, my grandpa said grandma had better put me in pants because she couldn’t keep me in dresses. So I had to wear a pretty blouse with my coveralls. I cut the lace off the blouses and wore them with my little boy coveralls. She really had a hard time with me.



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 a copy of A Gift of Age: Old Lesbian Life Stories.**

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 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 or going to our website and using the Donate Now button.*

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