

# The OLOHP Insider

3<sup>rd</sup> Issue for 2016

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project



## Arden's Musings

It feels both like I just wrote a column a short while ago, and like tons of things have happened since I last wrote. I know they say time flies when you're having fun, but this summer has been ridiculous!

In June, we headed to Madison, Wisconsin, for our annual trip to the National Women's Music Festival. We go because we love the music, but it's also a good place to connect with others who are interested in the Project. This year, we took advantage of that, and planned another training class for new interviewers, encouraged some of the experienced interviewers and Project volunteers to come, and did a presentation for Festival-goers. All of it went very well.

The class for interviewers was wonderful. Margaret kids me about my old school teaching habits kicking into high gear when we do classes, and she's right. I had outlines, I had notes, I had handouts, I had stickies marking pages in the Interviewers' Guide... I had a plan! But this bunch of new interviewers were amazing and we could barely keep up with them. Their enthusiasm was so infectious that a woman who had asked if she could sit in to see what it was all about asked if she could become an interviewer, too. Of course, I said, "Yes!"

We shared recently that we had passed a huge milestone this spring – the Project has conducted its 500<sup>th</sup> interview. To make sure, as Margaret put it, that "I realized how impressive that was," I was presented with a book with photos of the women we'd interviewed. Even with the handful of photos we had to leave out because we lacked permission, it was startling to see them all put together like this. Each was accompanied by a few statistics. It was presented, basically, in the order that their interviews occurred, and organized by each of the 18 years of the Project. Paging through it, I then found that interspersed between the pages chronicling the interviews were notes written to me from many of the interviewers.

We've added images of a few of the pages above so you'll get a feel for what I am now calling "The Big Book." The only problem with this gift that was presented to me, was that they gave it to me midway through the first classroom day and I had trouble paying attention from then on. Back in my earlier teaching years, I would have taken the book away from the inattentive student, but I can assure you, I wasn't going to let that happen to me. It's something I'll treasure for years.

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

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## Let Us Count the Ways...

You know that feeling, when you feel so strongly about something that you can't help but share it with everyone willing to listen? Well, that's our situation. We can't help but tell you about the Project falling in love.

How can a Project fall in love? Well, maybe it isn't so much falling in love, as having witnessed how amazing the women working with the Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project are, and being overwhelmed with a feeling of magic, amazement and gratitude.

Traditionally, we trained interviewers one-on-one, and that's resulted in quite a few interviewers doing lots of great work. Recently, we've also added classes. The dynamic of learning about the Project and interviewing with others has worked has enabled us to be more thorough. It's also been productive. In 2014, we did one in Phoenix, out of which we gained two women who are now active interviewers. The next training was in early 2015 in Albuquerque, and that gained us four dynamic women who have all been busy with the Project. When 2016 rolled around, we started by working with five women in Arizona. We'd barely made it home and unpacked from that trip before the new women were setting dates to begin interviewing! To say we were pleased with the outcome of holding classes is an understatement.

In June, we held one more class, and we can't tell you how incredible it was. When all was said and done, we ended up working with 14 women who will go on to interview on behalf of the Project! For a group that large, we enlisted help: Betsy from Tallahassee, Mary and Kathy from Washington, Edie from Gulfport, and Chris from Connecticut. They have all worked with the Project for years. Having the input and support of the experienced interviewers was invaluable.



Adlai  
Sharon and Carol

We struggle to find the right words to convey the magnitude of what transpired over those few days. These women were fully engaged from the moment we all met together, and their enthusiasm, questions, insights and constructive suggestions truly elevated the experience.

Jolly Sue  
Sue  
Betty

We had also invited anyone else working with the Project to join us as the new class was wrapping up. What an affirmation it was to have all five women who trained in Arizona just five months earlier (Beck, Dana, Jenny, Dee and Judi) come and participate, as well as others. And instead of leaving as soon as the class was over, all the new women stuck around, bringing their newfound enthusiasm to the discussions.

Ruth  
Bridget and Meadow



Margarette and Nan  
Carolyn and Donna

**All the women who work with the Project as interviewers, transcribers and volunteers are amazing. If you're one of them, we hope you know we love you. And we hope you know how much we value the gift you give to the Project, and to each of the women sharing her story.**

Liz  
Elsa

## One Way to Make a Big Impression!

It's not every day we work with a woman who is willing to not only share her story, but who wants to know what else she can do to help. We recently interviewed Kathy Knowles from Olalla, Washington, and she has lots to share. She has not only enjoyed each of her 80+ years, but she has a slew of photos to document it all. To keep from overwhelming us, Kathy embarked on a project of her own. She organized all of the photos, making sure there were captions identifying the people in the photos and denoting where the photo was taken and about when. Then she grouped those together by decade before giving them to us to scan! And, as if she hadn't already helped a lot, she asked what brand and type of paper we used for printing the text and photos and appeared with a package of each in hand! While all this wasn't necessary, and not everyone can do it, we can't help being impressed and more than a bit thankful!



*Betsy, an OLOHP interviewer, contacted us a while back, wanting to know if there was a way to record an interview conducted via telephone. We offered some options on how to manage the recording, and later, asked her to share how she felt it went.*

### ***A Telephone Interview by Betsy Tabac***

I recently conducted my first over-the-phone interview with an old lesbian. The interviewee is the new partner of a younger, long-time friend of mine. I decided to give the phone interview a try because I was not sure when I would see the interviewee, as she lives five hours away from me.

We did the usual preliminary business via phone and e-mail. I described the OLOHP in some detail, gave her the web address so she could get more information, scanned the contract, etc. We set the time and I was all ready to proceed. I called her cell phone on my cell phone. BUT, just as I was in the introductory portion of the interview (stating everyone's name, the date, and such), the formerly reliable OLOHP recorder FAILED at that crucial moment.



In their infinite wisdom and due — I am sure — to previous bad experiences, the Project had provided me with two digital recorders. My cell phone, set on speaker, was placed on my desk with the recorder adjacent, with the microphone end close to but not touching the phone. I sat about two feet away from my phone and spoke normally. The interviewee spoke normally into her cell phone and the wonderful little recorder captured the entire conversation.

It was much less satisfying doing an interview on the phone than in-person. The problem is that the interview felt businesslike as compared to the others I have done. My “charge,” my reward, the thing that keeps me going back for more interviews, is the connection I feel with the interviewees. This interpersonal connection did not happen during the phone interview. That is the essence of the Project for me, although I admit the historical value carries weight too.

### ***New, Improved... and in a Way, Revelatory***

A bonus that came out of the recent class and meeting in Wisconsin was a new and improved mission statement for the Project. Here it is:

***The OLOHP collects and preserves our life stories (focusing on lesbians aged 70 and older) to honor the lives of old lesbians.***

As many of you know, it's not always easy to come up with something concise, but that we feel says it all. The discussion that gave birth to the revised mission statement wasn't so short; but for us, it was revealing.

We've always seen our reasons for doing this work as: 1. To preserve a wealth of detailed, first person information for researchers about the lives and experiences of lesbians 70 and older, and 2. To give the women willing to share their stories the gift of our listening, validating what they have experienced and then creating their own Herstory book.

What we've come to realize is that most of the interviewers have flipped those two around. First and foremost, it is the gift of listening to these women, showing they care about and value what the women are sharing. Next, it seems they are working with the Project because of the richness of their own experiences in meeting, interviewing, and working with the women sharing their stories. And lastly, almost as an aside, they're doing this to create the valuable archive of information that will live on beyond us all. Enlightening – revealing.

**enable** [en-ey-buh l]  
verb (used with object), enabled, enabling.  
to make able; give power, means, competence, or ability to; authorize

In some ways, it doesn't make any difference in the end why we are all working so hard on the Project. In other ways, it helps to understand what motivates each of us. Knowing why women are devoting hundreds of hours to the Project helps us become better “enablers,” in the positive sense of that term. Given that it seems it's a win-win-win, then we're all happy.

*Excerpts in this issue are all from amazing women who have recently died – they will be missed.*

In updating our database, we recently learned that these three women had died some time ago...



**Leann Swofford**  
70 when interviewed  
Born 1937  
Melrose, Florida  
Interviewer: Arden



**Jane Tobias**  
78 when interviewed  
Born 1932  
Warren, Ohio  
Interviewer: Arden



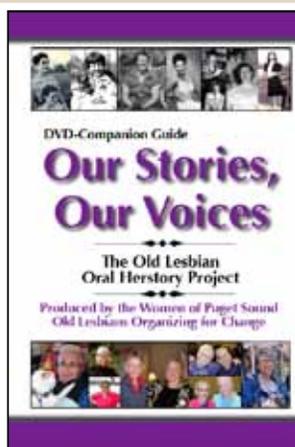
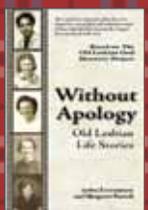
**Margaret Killough**  
71 when interviewed  
Born 1932  
Belleville, Illinois  
Interviewer: Arden

### **Excerpt from Leann's interview:**

We would lay there beside each other and had those feelings, hold hands, had those feelings. And we fought it, fought it, fought it, fought it, fought it. And we never went there. We talked about it, and we wrote letters to each other. Well, her mom suspected something. So in the morning they got up and left a day early and she just wrote something on the mirror in lipstick to me. They had to leave because her mom suspected something. But, you know, it wasn't anything that... that we wouldn't put words to or anything. So, they left. And gee, I'm startin' to tear up a little bit now. It hurt, a lot.

Because, you know, we really had somethin'. And so, then we didn't talk to each other for awhile and then we started writing letters. She also, previously, would come to my house and my daddy one time said something like, "You haven't gone queer on me, have ya?" And, "Oh, no. No, no, no."

So I married. Prior to marrying him, I had these horrible anxiety attacks. I mean just, in the pit of my stomach, heaviness and everything like that. All the time I was thinking of my friend Paula, who was married, who I couldn't have a relationship with. And so I went ahead and married him. He ended up being a Baptist deacon. Our kids were at the church every time the doors opened and doin' all the little Baptist right wing radical stuff. Narrow-minded stuff. And still I was in contact with Paula, all throughout the relationship. We would go there and visit now and then. And a couple of times my husband was really suspicious, really suspicious. I guess he really saw – we weren't doing anything, but we were connected. We were connected.



### **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.

**A special thanks to OLOC, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, [www.oloc.org](http://www.oloc.org), for their ongoing support.**