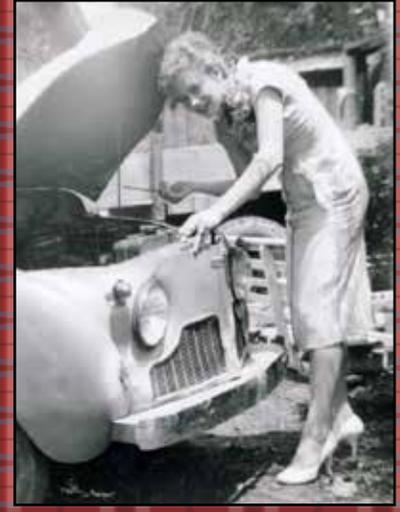


The OLOHP Insider

#48, September 2021

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project



Arden's Musings

It's hard to believe it's time for another *Insider!* I won't miss the 90+° temps, but I can't help but feel a loss as summer begins to move into fall. Life continues to change in unpredictable ways as we deal with the ongoing pandemic. With travel curtailed and all the uncertainties about the safety of actually spending time with people, I continue to spend more time at home than I'm used to. I itch to get back out, but know that's not the smart thing to do yet. So I hang around home.

A friend has helped me get a new computer set up, working out the bugs that always come with that task. At my age, I'd thought I was done buying new computers, but that wasn't so. Having a functioning computer is even more essential now than ever.

Staying around home, I've been thinking about various women I've interviewed over the years. I've lost touch with too many. In an effort to correct that situation, I've taken on the challenge of tracking them down, and, if possible, catching up with them via the phone. It's been an incredibly fulfilling undertaking! There are some I've failed to track down, but I'm not done trying. This is yet another reason I needed to have a working computer... many

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of the women have moved, e-mail addresses may no longer work, and phone numbers have changed, all of which add to the challenge, but it's been well worth it.

We don't often identify the women whose pictures we share on the front page, and we won't here either. Sometimes we select the pix at random, but this time there is a connection. All four are women who have recently died – each is featured later in this issue of *The Insider*.

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Over the years, I've hesitated to use the term story... in my experience, story was too often used to imply what was being shared was made up. Milne, Dickens, Tolkien, and Hemingway were storytellers. For more than 20 years now, the Project has provided an avenue for old lesbians to tell their stories, and I've gained a new appreciation for the word. These women share their lives, their memories, their feelings, their truths... they share their stories. In doing so, they create a sense of connection. I will be eternally grateful to the women of the OLOHP who, by sharing their stories, have generously invited us into their lives.

Arden

Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older
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It Got Us Thinking... by Arden & Margaret

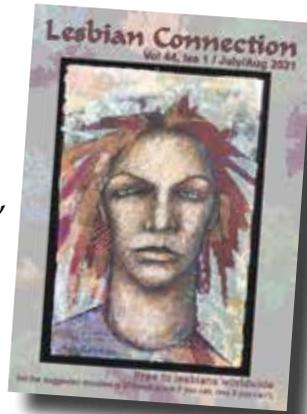
Some of you are probably familiar with the magazine *Lesbian Connection*. (For those who aren't, *LC* has been around for decades, serving as a forum for readers to share their thoughts with readers – readers create the content. In recent years, we have both been struck by the occasional note in *LC* from a reader expressing the writer's displeasure with the Passings section of the magazine. Some have said they found that section depressing. Others suggested *LC* devoted way too much space to the subject. It is there in *LC*'s passings that many of us learn of the deaths of lesbians we once knew, heard about, admired, or maybe didn't know at all.

When that sentiment was expressed once again in a recent issue, it made us stop and wonder. We almost always devote a significant amount of space to Passings in *The Insider*. In fact, in a recent issue, Passings took almost all the space. It will in this issue as well.

LC and *The Insider* are distinctly different publications, but might we too be described as depressing? Do some of our readers feel the space should be used in a different manner?

Our deep love this Project and our ages (Arden is 90 and Margaret 70) both contribute to our perspective on the topic, admittedly limiting our ability to be impartial!

As we mentioned, *LC* has had other readers express similar feelings in the past, but so far *LC* has continued to include Passings. We are



very glad they do. And we are very comfortable with what we do as well. We differ in that *LC* relies on someone to submit an article about the woman's life — we often use an excerpt from the women's Herstory to accompany our recognition of her passing.

We all deal with death a bit differently. Neither is looking back everyone's cup of tea. The women expressing their displeasure with *LC* allocating space to Passings have just as much right to feel that way as do those of us who feel otherwise. But instead of urging *LC* to limit or omit that section, why not simply skip reading it?

The thought of not including Passings in our newsletter or in *LC* is sad. In both cases, what is written about these women has almost nothing to do with their deaths... it shares with you, the readers, some words that they said, or a few details about the lives these women lived. Their deaths aren't the story - their death is only a period at the end of a very, very long sentence. How fortunate we are to have known these women, or if we didn't know them, to have the chance to read about them.

Here in *The Insider*, we will continue to include Passings on any woman who shared her story with us and truly hope *LC* will do the same... We'll each continue our subscriptions and we'll send a donation on behalf of the Project as well!

A Mutual Admiration Society

The Project gets feedback from various sources, and we always welcome it. But a note like the one we recently got from two of our interviewers stands out. We appreciated learning of Joan's passing, but what makes this note even more meaningful is the last paragraph. Here we are, grateful to Donna & Carolyn for doing what it took to get this interview and shepherd it through all the steps it takes to create a Herstory... yet they are thanking the Project!

Like Donna & Carolyn, dozens of women have volunteered to help as interviewers. They have all been invaluable, enabling the Project to work with women we would never have reached without them. Truly a mutual admiration society!

I wanted to pass along the news that Joan Kalahiki passed away on July 9, 2021 after having been diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukemia in mid-June. Joan told us she had been experiencing extreme fatigue for a few weeks prior to her diagnosis. Although not the news she expected or wanted to hear she was relieved to have a diagnosis. Joan used the weeks after diagnosis to notify loved ones and say goodbye. This was typical Joan and a continuation of the wonderful energy and spirit she carried with her through her 92 years of life.

We are mourning the loss of our friend, but it reminded us how fortunate we are to be involved with the OLOHP. If it weren't for the OLOHP we likely would never have met Joan and we certainly would not have come to know her as well as we did.

Donna & Carolyn

*Excerpts from the Herstories of women who have recently passed
They were all incredible women, well-loved, and we will miss them.*



Madge Sutter, born 1941
Interviewed by Sherry F in 2012
lived in Desert Hot Springs, CA

I never, ever had a inkling of such a thing. I had two lesbians working for me in my first job in New York City. I needed to fire one of them and I talked to the general manager – I had to get permission. And he said, “Oh. Well now, look. If you fire her, so-and-so will leave with her.”

I said, “Why?” He said, “Well, they’re lesbians. And they live together, and they work together. If you take one, you’ve got to take the other.” “Oh.” I had to ask somebody. I needed to ask him, “What’s a lesbian?” Where I came from, there was no such thing. One in a while, you’d hear about a queer, a man, a school teacher, or something like that. Everybody made fun of him, calling him (inaudible phrase or word). That’s all I ever knew.

Joy Griffith, born 1935
Interviewed by Chris P in 2011
lived in Burlington, VT



It was confusing. It was the first time, blah, blah, blah. They sent me to a doctor and I guess he was a shrink. I didn’t say anything about breaking up with her. I just told him I was miserable, and I was unhappy, so he let it be that the military bothered me, and it didn’t! I kind of liked it. He said, “You take to the military like a duck takes to water. Why don’t we just sign you out of the military. You’ll have an honorable discharge, and no problem whatsoever.” At the time, I had very bad allergies to whatever was in the air down there. San Antonio is kind of a dry place, but I had tough allergies there. So we used the allergies for part of the reason, and I got an honorable discharge and left.

But by that time, I had a realization of who I really was, for the first time.

Jean Grozholtz, born 1929
Interviewed by Edie D in 2014; lived in South Hadley, MA

I was okay with myself. I wasn’t okay with other people. Although I did everything possible to make them understand who I was, often times guys would hit on me and I’d say, “I’m not interested, guys.” A lot of them didn’t get it but it didn’t matter. To me, I had quit going along and gradually, as time went on, I made more steps out into that place. But at the time, people lost their jobs, their children! So many women lost their children during those times. If you went to a dyke bar, the dykes didn’t want to be called lesbians. They were not lesbians. “We’re gay!” In the ‘50s and ‘60s, there was a lot of self-hatred on the part of people and I understood that because I had been part of that, too.



Alix Dobkin, born 1940
Interviewed by Arden in 2010
lived in Woodstock, NY

She was on a show called Electra Rewired. It was at midnight once a week. I loved that show. I heard her announce, make an announcement for women songwriters. She knew all these men songwriters but she hadn’t heard any women songwriters.

I had written a few feminist songs, even. I had written *My Kind of Girl*, and *Fantasy Girl*, and a couple of other things that were kind of feminist. So, I called her up in the spring of ‘71. I said, “I write songs and I’m a singer.” She said, “Wonderful. Can you come on the show?” I said, “Yes, but I’m going away for the summer and when I come back, I’ll call you.”

When I got back from Vermont in the fall of ‘71 I called her and we made an appointment for me to go up to the radio and do a show. I remember that evening so well, from leaving my apartment to taking the subway uptown... though I remembered the wrong address... Liza said we weren’t there, we were at the church. I went up there and met Liza and we fell in love on the air. Her mother called the next day and said, “What was goin’ on with you two?” “Nothing. What do you mean?”

We had no clue.



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Linda Betzer, born 1948
Interviewed by Elizabeth B in 2020; lived in Chesterland, OH

After she died, I came out of the closet totally at work. You know what? For the most part, nobody cared, but there were still people in my office who never spoke to me again. These people weren't people that I had had regular chit-chat with, but if they saw me walking down the aisle, they would find an office to duck into so they wouldn't have to speak to me, let alone say, "Sorry for your loss" or anything like that. They never uttered another word to me because of their prejudice. I thought, "Right-oh!" That takes a toll.

Jean 'Tangren' Alexander, born 1940
Interviewed by Arden in 2017
lived in Ashland, OR

When my daughter was about eight, I finally came out. That was in, like, '76. By that time, there was enough of a women's movement that I could find some lesbians. There was women's music, which was huge for me. It's like, that's what I needed to know, that there was some culture. I mean I was just not going to go out and play baseball games! [laughs] That was just not my style. When I began to understand that there were books and records especially written by women about loving women, I began to be able to see that there could be a life for me and a place for me in the women's movement. It took me about a year and a half, I guess, to actually come out.



Ellen Spangler, born 1934
Interviewed by Barb K, in 2017
lived in Mentone, AL

Looking back I knew I was a lesbian, in my heart. What I was out about was that I knew I was so connected with women. I just didn't understand that [being a lesbian] was really even an option. I didn't think of it in terms of sexual things, intimacy. These women were the people I admired. These women were my closest friends, and those friendships were crucial to me.



Joan Kalahiki, born 1928
Interviewed by Donna & Carolyn in 2017; lived in Apache Junction, AZ

We started playing tennis together. Then I took her out snorkeling and taught her how to snorkel. The waves sometimes came up in the lagoon, so I took her out and taught her how to surf. We were spending more and more and more time together and over the course of five or six months, we fell totally in love. We were just sitting outside on the side of the lagoon on some big rocks watching the moon come up. All of a sudden, we were in each other's arms, kissing each other. She said "Did you need this as much as I needed it? Oh, my God!"

For the first time in my life I realized what had been going on all my life, that feeling that I had no name for, didn't know. All my friends were straight, and here I was, married with five children and madly in love, carrying on an affair on a little island four miles long by half mile wide – a very exciting, scary, wonderful time – all combined. I thought, "Well, if my husband finds out, what's going to happen?" I must add that I never felt an ounce of guilt – he lost me as his wife the first time he hit me. Of course, over the course of time she and I were found out.

How can you keep that kind of thing a secret? She gave me the courage to leave him.



A Special Thank You to the Kellett Foundation for your support of the OLOHP!

