

The OLOHP Insider

#39... 2nd Issue for 2018

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project



Between her self-described hillbilly accent, her stories of her dog who hypnotized snakes, or running moonshine in the trunk of her car to make money for college, transcribing Madge's story was a delight!



Not Arden's Musings!

Margaret, here. I'm not going to attempt to fill Arden's shoes, but for this issue, I am going to fill the space where her article appears. Don't worry, she'll be back! Until then, you're stuck with my ruminations about transcribing, listening vs. reading, pauses, and laughter.

I'd been working with Arden for a couple of years when I noticed how backed up the Project was on getting interviews transcribed, so I thought I'd pitch in and give it a go myself. I quickly learned three valuable lessons.

Lesson One: Transcribers rock! When I was in high school, Miss Miller tried her best to teach me secretarial skills that every young woman (*read: young women who weren't "college material"*) needed to get a job. As I worked on my first transcription forty years later, I couldn't help but wonder if maybe I should have paid attention to Miss Miller. When I keep my fingers on the keyboard and focus, I can transcribe, at most, 15 minutes of audio in an hour – but more often, it's only 10-12 minutes. When the Project is fortunate enough to have someone volunteer to transcribe a story, I try to be up front with them about how long it takes. Despite thinking I must be the worst typist on earth since it takes me all day to transcribe an hour's worth of an interview, most volunteers quickly discover it's not as easy as it looks.

Lesson Two: It's not just typing. We can't fully convey all the nuances of the audio of an interview, but we are able to help a bit. When appropriate, we made note when there were long pauses, when the woman was upset as she spoke, or when she was laughing. There are times I've laughed out loud while transcribing... and times I've been overwhelmed by the emotions being openly, and bravely, shared. The stories are all interesting, but one I was looking at last month stood out... by the time the transcription reached its end, there had been 63 notations that the women had been laughing! I couldn't help but wish I'd been there... which brings me to lesson three.

Lesson Three: Interviewing is an amazing gift to the interviewer. Six-hundred-fifty interviews and counting and the most common piece of feedback we get from our interviewers is how honored they are to play their roles in gathering and preserving these stories. Often they are interviewing women they've never even met, or know only casually – but the outcome is almost always the same: a friendship is born, or the roots of an existing friendship are deepened. Our work continues to be aimed at meeting our stated mission and goals, but it certainly doesn't stop there. It goes so much deeper than that.

Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older

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What Will The Insider #40 Bring?

Ignoring the fact that we lost track and inadvertently skipped an issue number a couple years back and never corrected that goof, the next issue of *The OLOHP Insider* after this one will be #40, a milestone in its own right. To us, it seems fitting that #40 will celebrate the Project's 20th Anniversary. It'll be a big issue, and chock full, with lots of photos... so big that we're looking into an alternative way to distribute it. The vast majority of our readers receive *The Insider* as a pdf. We do our best to keep each issue to less than a MB, a size that most email applications handle without a problem. That said, the Anniversary Issue will be a large enough file that it may cause some problems... but don't worry... we have an idea. If all goes according to plan, we anticipate it'll reach you in late September/early October.



This Is Issue 39.

We continue to learn about the deaths of more and more women who shared their stories with the OLOHP. The rest of this issue will be devoted to passing along information about them. They are an amazing group of women whose words will continue to live on.

There is a cadre of women in the Pacific Northwest who work with the Project and are sharing the sadness of all the deaths. Living on the green side of Washington, their lives often include visits to the forests in the Olympic Mountains and the Cascades, which shape the way they look at this aspect of life. They offer this way of looking at the losses the Project is experiencing: *A fallen log plays an important role in the constant renewal that prevails in a healthy forest. It provides a growth substrate that is different from the rest of the forest floor, increasing the diversity of habitats for the new generation of trees. We have similar feelings about the women we lose...some have fallen, but they've added to our lives, and memories of them help us grow as we move forward.*



Pearl Berlin

born 1925, died 2018
Resided in High Point, NC
Interviewed by Arden in 2011



N = Narrator, Pearl I = Interviewer, Arden

N: There is one thing I think you ought to know about that I did that's typical of me. It was during my second big love affair. She was away and I was writing her a letter. As I said, I love to write. And I wrote to my parents. One day I wrote to my parents *and* to Olga, and I put the wrong letter ...

I: ...in the wrong envelope. Oh! Oh!

N: And I didn't have any clue. The next day the phone rang. It was my mother. You have to know, she was the most wonderful woman on earth. She said, "Pearl, I just want you to know I got the mail. You clearly made a mistake yesterday sending letters and you sent me the letter for Olga." I about died. But she says, "I just want you to know something. I will never, ever mention this again. When and if, when and if you ever want to talk about it, we can do so. And I want you to know one thing for sure. Your father will never see this letter. It is already in an envelope re-addressed to you and that's it. Let's not talk about it anymore. And don't worry one minute."

I: What a comin' out!

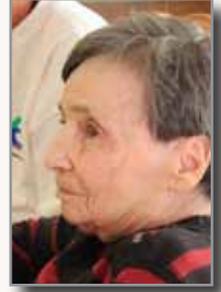
N: Well, she had an inkling. And she was a rare bird. She loved Lenny [the woman Pearl was with for more than 50 years] as if she were her own daughter.



Adobe Joan Pepper

born 1932, died 2018
Resided in Arizona
Interviewed by P. Wheeler in 2006

Adobe purchased land in the Tucson Mountains more than 30 years ago and created Adobeland, a commune for women. Hundreds of women passed thru Adobeland, some staying days, others for years.



Jo Hiner

born 1926, died 2018
Resided in
Minneapolis, MN

Interviewed in 2002
by Arden
and again in 2015
by Sherry Fulton



My mother had visited, maybe six months before. I guess she had heard. That other musician, I think, maybe told her that I was interested in this woman in school. My mother came out, and met Cynthia. Then Cynthia left and my mother started crying. I think she cried for about 24 hours, and came back home. She talked to her minister here, and he said, "Well, when women decided to be lesbians it's because their mothers didn't do a good job of mothering." My poor mother.

M* born 1944, died 2018

I just knew that I was different, because I liked trains when I was young. I didn't like girls' stuff. My sister had 26 dolls. I had one doll. She was always dressed in overalls. Her name is "Irene," and she's back there. "I want to be somebody who can be the first woman big league baseball player! I want to start a Little League team, dammit! I'm better than those little boys!"

Later, there was a little club where you rented a mystery book and then brought it back. There were these big boxes, and they were paperbacks. They were 25 cents, or 15 cents each. Of course, what did I get? The Well of Loneliness. Then, later, at the end of my freshman year at St. John's, I went to see the movie The Children's Hour. So you have The Well of Loneliness on one side, and you have The Children's Hour on the other. That sealed it – I had to eventually kill myself. Thirty is when I said that would happen. When I couldn't because ... another person killed herself, and I saw what it did to the people at St. John's. I decided I would wait until 60. By the time I got to be 60, things opened up a little bit.

* M died before completing the work with her herstory and hadn't decided on whether to sign a conditional or unconditional contract, so we cannot share her last name, where she lived or photos.



Laura Godfredsen

born 1933, died 2017
Resided in Wellesly, MA
Interviewed in 2012 by
Chris Pattee

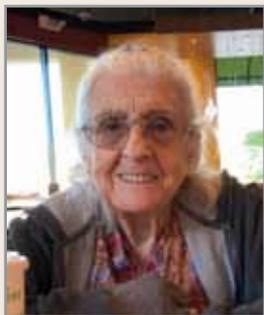


Laura was born and raised as Larry. She transitioned in late life, identifying and living as a lesbian.

I know it is hard for people who have not gone through this to understand. At some point you know you can't continue the life you have lived in your body. And you know that this is not a reversible situation. You have no idea how you will feel, what you will look like, if you can have orgasms. It is all unknown. And worse you have no idea whether your kids or friends will adjust to your new person. And yet you are the same person you have always been.

Barbara Kalish

born 1929, died 2018
Resided in
Long Beach, CA
Interviewed in 2001
by Arden



We were at a barbeque and I saw this little person... I mean a little person. And this person, I think, liked Charlie. Charlie was sort of pretty. I think she liked Charlie. And the little person had a little chair. And the little person had a little basket and in the little basket was a little plate and a fork, a knife, a spoon and a cup. And the little person sat in the little chair. She opened up her little basket and didn't know what to do, how to get the food. She seemed to have never been to a barbecue before. Well she came with a friend of mine and the friend of mine introduced us, and I went, "Hi, how are you?" And that was Cristina.

Cristina and I have been together 15 years. She's got to be the sweetest, nicest human being I've ever met. She's kind and thoughtful. Yeah... perfect for me. And we've had a good life. We've traveled a lot. We've gone across country in the motor home a couple times. We broke our legs the same time in Panama City, Florida, the same leg, in the same spot... five minutes apart. We've had a good life. We really truly have.

I don't look back. I live every one as if it was the last day. I live every day and enjoy every day.

Kim Kimber

born 1932, died 2018
Resided in Fairfield, CT
Interviewed in 2011
by Chris Pattee



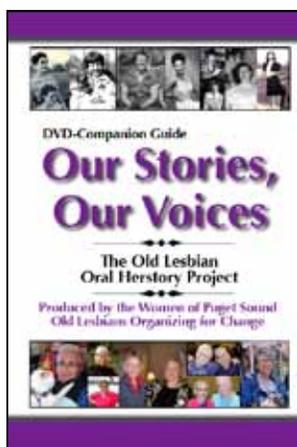
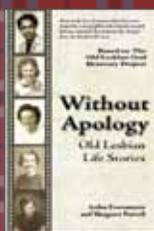
I really had a crush on her, literally. In fact, she was, I'm not sure whether she was the boating counselor or if we were on a canoe trip when this photo was taken. But she was also one of the equestrian counselors. There were two. One of them was the co-director of this summer camp that I attended for years and years and years. But she's the one, the only one that I can really think of as my having a crush on. Now, I didn't really come to the realization that I was lesbian until I was maybe 35 years of age. And it was this other young woman who introduced me to gay bars and things like that.

Laurie Rose Simon

born 1949, died 2018
Resided in Maplewood, MN
Interviewed in 2015
by Sherry Fulton



Our marriage was falling apart. It had nothing to do at that point with being a lesbian because I didn't know at that point. I really didn't. I was oblivious. I didn't even know what a lesbian was until, maybe I was in college. It never dawned on me that women could be sexual with one another. But some inklings were there because I had a cousin who I wanted to touch, and it scared the living daylights out of me. I was in therapy at that point in graduate school. It was part of the curriculum in a sense. You didn't have to but most everybody did. The therapist I had then said, "Just because you want to touch someone doesn't mean you're a lesbian." I just wanted to be like everyone else, so I ended up getting married.



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+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

** Tax-deductible donations can be made to the OLOHP either by using the Donate button on our website, or mailing a check.