

# The OLOHP Insider

#43, Early Winter 2019

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project



## *Arden's Musings*

Throughout the past 30 years, Charlotte, my late spouse, and I traveled a lot, sometimes making a dozen trips, short and long, in one year. Early on, the destination of many of our travels revolved around our work with one organization or another, but sometimes trips were just for ourselves. We created a Bucket List along the way, a proverbial list of things we wanted to do before we kicked the bucket. In more recent years, we started another list too, a One More Time list.

My Bucket List trip for this year was to Costa Rica. I was able to travel with three friends. It was such a beautiful country, and friendly people. I also managed to cross a destination off my One More Time list when I took a six-day sail on a three-masted windjammer sailing out of Maine. I had sailed in that same area both in 1979 and in 1981, but on a different schooner. This adventure included a member of my extended family, which made it even more soul-satisfying.

Costa Rica and Maine were the two trips that bracketed my annual treks to Madison, for the National Women's Music Fest, and the Puget Sound, to work with Margaret on the Project and take in the Vancouver Folk Music Fest. All and all, it's been an incredibly busy 2019.

While I am taking more trips just for myself these days, I do have to admit I'm always looking to see how I might be able to manage an interview or two for the OLOHP along the way. Following the windjammer trip, I did an interview in a little fishing village in Maine.

I also watch for opportunities to reconnect with women who had shared their stories with the Project years back. That has allowed me to update quite a few stories of women I interviewed as many as ten or fifteen years ago. I'm always pleased to see the amount of living we old lesbians can do in that number of years!

Guess all this shows how much a part of me the OLOHP is. I set out to do something from one of my lists, and I find myself looking for ways to squeeze in just a bit of work towards gathering and preserving the collective herstory of the women with whom I've spent my entire life, lesbians who lived through an unparalleled time in LGBTQ history.

I would wish everyone as grand an old age as I am experiencing. I was born in 1931. Sure, I have some annoying creaks, move a bit slower, and go to bed earlier... but I'm generally enjoying good health. And I'm surely blessed with an amazing support system of my sisters.

I wish a safe and happy future for everyone.

*Arden*

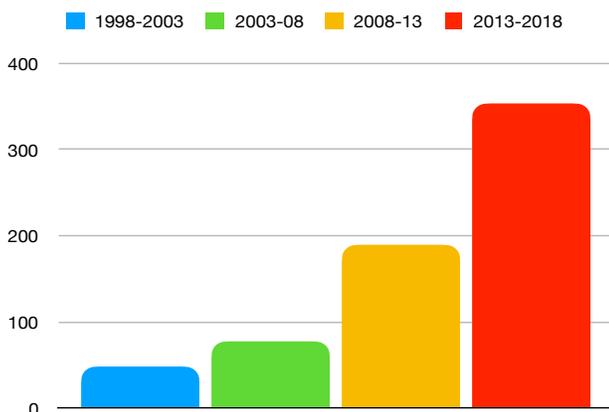
*Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older*  
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## Wrapping Up 2019, and Welcoming 2020



It's been a year of significant contrasts for the Project. We truly have been busier than ever. That said, we did approximately 30 interviews, far fewer than we did in any of the past few years. From our perspective, the slowdown has been a good thing. We regret each story that we miss getting; we are still doing outreach and getting new interviews, but finding more women to interview isn't our sole focus anymore.

During 2019, we needed to devote a larger part of our time to playing catch-up. The numbers quickly tell why. A quick glance at the chart below shows the progression in the Project broken down into five-year blocks. The Project started out slowly picked up some speed, and then the flood gates opened! In the five year period from 2013 to 2018, we managed to conduct 353 interviews!



As the explosion occurred, we spent time being both pleased to gather that many new Herstories, but also being challenged. It meant we'd have to up our game and spend a tremendous amount of our energies on processing all those interviews.

When you look at just what we had committed ourselves to doing, you see that it was a matter of both money and time. Surprisingly, the money was something we were more easily able to manage. Stories vary significantly, but on average, it costs us around \$1000 to do a woman's Herstory from start to finish. At times we did have to hustle to get enough money, but the Project is fortunate in having so many folks see the importance of what we are doing, and contributing financially.

Time is a bigger challenge. Depending on factors such as length of the interview, whether or not we have to scan photos and other materials, and the volume of supporting documents, doing a Herstory can take as few as 30 hours to complete, to well over 100 hours.

Add a few more complicating factors: Once we get the audio from the interviewer, it is transcribed. Right now, we're keeping up with incoming audios, getting them turned around in a month or so. But there have been times it has taken us five or six months to turn them around. The transcript then goes to the interviewer to review, then to the woman sharing her story to edit, or amend in any way she wants. When we have the transcript back, we take the time to work with any support documents that have been supplied. Many are photos, many are decades old, and time may have damaged them, so we try to improve the quality as best we can. We then arrange the support documents on pages, and add captions, create a title page, and such. Next is the printing and assembling, packaging and mailing, of the finalized Herstory. (A copy goes to the woman who shared her story with us, and a copy is assembled for archiving.)

How long does all that take? The quickest turn-around for a Herstory was a month. The woman was in hospice and everyone involved moved at lightning speed so we could get her finalized story to her so she could share it with friends and family over the last few weeks of her life. We can't tell you the longest turn-around time, 'cause there are a few we are still working on five years after the initial interview! Most stories are finalized in a matter of a year or two, at most. A few women are able to get edits back to us in a matter of weeks... others take years.

Where did that leave us in 2019? Overall, we've been working with almost 200 stories this year – 75 or so actively in progress, and the rest stalled somewhere along the way. That should give you a sense of why we're okay that new interviews slowed down in 2019. At some point, we'll have to say, "Enough!" and stop interviewing altogether, but we're not there yet. For now, we will continue to reach out and find women who are willing to share their stories. And we'll continue to work to whittle away at the mountain of stories that are somewhere in process.

Two or three more new interviews may come in before we bring 2019 to a close. For now, it's looking like we'll probably end the year having added 30 new interviews, bringing us to an impressive total of 735 interviews since the beginning of the Project. Certainly an amazing accomplishment!

*We have learned that these women who shared their stories or worked with the OLOHP have died. They were loved, and we'll miss them.*



### **Nancy Humphries, Connecticut, Born 1938, Interviewed in 2015**

We only discussed this once in my life. I never had any need to tell my parents that I was a lesbian. It just never seemed important to me. I also had internalized a lot of homophobia from the '50s. I was in a nine year relationship with a woman that I had no sexual involvement with at all, but we lived like a Boston marriage. In fact, one night we were preparing dinner for a group of people, and she was holding all of the dinner plates to go and put them on the table. Someone said, "You two are like an old married couple." She proceeded to drop all of the dinner plates on the floor and broke all of them. She was so stunned at the mere thought. Of course, it was exactly what I thought all along.

### **Jill Karpf, Massachussets, Born 1941, Interviewed in 2014**

We went to a gay bar. We were tired of being with men, so, I guess that's how we got there. I have no idea where it was, or what it was called, but we went in there. There we were in our plaid skirts and knee socks and Shetland sweaters with our little white round collars. We walked in, and all these women had DAs [Duck's ass haircut style] and cigarettes behind their ears. Very butchy lesbians.

They looked at us, and they were like, "Let's have some fun." These women started coming over and ended up touching me, you know, pinching my cheeks, and boy, we freaked out. We went out of there within probably five minutes. They were laughing at us when we literally ran out. That was my impression of lesbians. Well, I sure knew I wasn't like that, even though I was very taken with women. I knew I wasn't like that. That cooled my activities looking for women.



### **Emma Joy Crone, British Columbia, Canada Born 1928, Interviewed 2005**

I went to Hornby Island and I'm still there 20 years later. I love it and it's beautiful. There are some well known lesbians here. We are not a community, but there are quite a few of us. I learned last year there is some homophobia. A friend said another person came up to her and said "Do you know there is a lesbian living on this island? Isn't that awful?"

### **Pat Hight, Missouri, Born 1947, Interviewed in 2015**

The first time I remember being really attracted to a woman or a girl was this girl named Elise something who showed up in our school. I think she was probably in my grade. Her parents had emigrated from Ceylon, so, of course, she looked different than everyone else. But I was just in love with her. I just thought she was the best thing to come along. I just loved her.

I knew I was a lesbian and I already had seen the prejudice. There was a woman in my family at home, part of the outer circle of our family. She was a big old bull dyke. She played ball and she'd roll her cigarettes up in her T-shirt sleeves and all that kind of stuff. I remember how they talked about her. Ugly, very ugly. I think that scared me, you know. That, and my parents' insistence that I "femme it up."



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### **Louise Cason & Ruth Taylor, Florida, Born 1923**

Louise: I grew up in Lakeland, graduated from Lakeland High School. I had an inkling that I might be gay in High School. I spent the night, one night, with a girlfriend and I was terribly aware of her body. It sort of scared me. Then I went to college and the second year Ruth and I took Physics together. The electricity. She was a year ahead of me and it didn't take long for us to find out. As she says, "I ran hard enough so you could catch up with me."

Ruth: I feel like we were very lucky to find each other. Really. We've been entirely compatible. She sometimes thinks because of her handicaps that that might make me sorry I did this, but I don't feel that way. I feel like we're both very fortunate



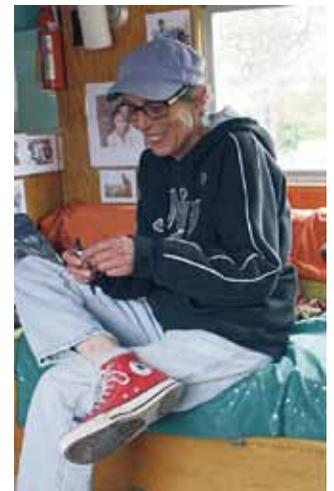
### **Angel Walker (aka Satan's Angel) California Born 1944 Interviewed 2018**

I was a very outspoken lesbian. I got my ass kicked all the time. Was I ever arrested? No. But I have been kidnapped and treated badly

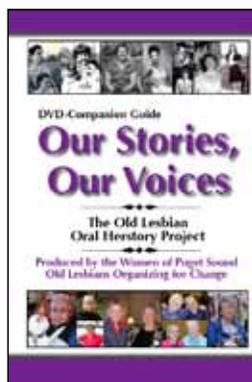
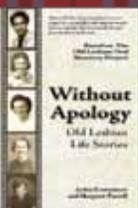
because of it! I travel like say from here to say Kansas City to go to work. I would get there, and someone would say, "You know Satan's Angels are queer." The next thing I know, they were throwing my shit, and me, out in the alley in the rain, hail, sleet. I lost a lot of jobs. I lost regular jobs and movie jobs. I went from speaking parts to jobs as an extra. They still wanted me in it, but they just didn't want me to say anything. I was a very outspoken lesbian. I got my ass kicked all the time.

### **Morgan Ahern Washington Born 1948 Interviewed 2012**

I've always known. My family has always been really good about that. My father had a boyfriend that I always remember being around. My mother and he got along really well. Then there was this woman that my mother hung out with. It was never overt, so I can't say for sure, but I think my mother was having a relationship with this woman named Dora. So it was no big deal, you know. I just think that I always knew, but I never even put a name, if I even knew a word for it. Then, people told me what I was.



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



### **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: The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project* 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.

