

# The OLOHP Insider

#52, Special Issue, Late 2022

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

## *We Had a Plan*

A while back Arden and I decided that this issue, the last Insider of 2022, was going to be all positive content. By that, we meant that we didn't intend to include info about anyone's passing. While we didn't see honoring a woman's life as negative, we simply felt we also needed to focus more on honoring those who continue to thrive and are a part of the Project, hence no Passings section. To paraphrase an old adage, "the best laid plans often go astray." For now, the amended plan is to delay that issue until later. This one will be all about Arden.

## *Musing About Arden*

After 13 years with the same article title on the first page of each issue of *The OLOHP Insider*, we had to make a change. By now, most of you have heard that Arden passed away in mid-November, while in hospice.

Arden had faced her share of health challenges in life, as many of us have. Twenty+ years ago, she went for a pre-op before cataract surgery, only to find out she had breast cancer – in both breasts – each different – each at a different stage. Fast forward 15+ years to find out that while she may have put breast cancer behind her, she had a super-rare form of blood cancer, one for which there is no cure, only treatment. So the new regimen was worked into her daily life and she continued on with everything she was doing, and wanted yet to do.

You might be wondering what it is Arden had left undone at that point in her life. Most of it was more of what she'd always loved doing, working on the Project and conducting more interviews. She participated in more local functions, went to concerts, traveled and more. But she also dearly wanted to put checkmarks next to a few more items on her bucket list. One she did manage to check off was to go zip-lining, in her mid 80s!

Last winter Arden took a misstep while trying to sit down at a restaurant and ended up sitting on the floor. Thinking she was okay, only a bit embarrassed, she went about her business, even going back to refill her plate at the buffet before driving home. Hours later, after having relaxed in her easy chair, she found she couldn't get back up. She had actually cracked her femur close to the hip joint. As you could imagine, that one did slow her down, but not for long. Determined to get back to her life, she did all the right things, and although she had to use a walker when out and about from then on, she managed to pick back up where she'd left off.

Almost two years earlier, COVID had derailed one of Arden's big plans. She'd had a trip set with a group of friends in 2020 that had to be canceled, rescheduled, then canceled again when COVID lingered. This past August, when it seemed to be safer, the trip was back

on and she spent a great week in Nova Scotia (at the home of Lucie Blue and Pat). The photo on this page was taken while she was there.

Arden was happy, but tired, when she got back home, and when she developed a lingering cough a week later, she simply attributed it to being a bit worn out. Or at most, it was allergies. Or... or... or... Despite being a rabid mask-wearer whenever out in public, it seems she was exposed to COVID on her long trip home and when she couldn't avoid it any longer, she was hospitalized with COVID and pneumonia.

Arden fretted. She was set to do a presentation at a conference in Dallas. She had agreed to be interviewed by a young film-maker who wanted to do a piece on her. She had two interviews scheduled. Once again, Arden did everything she could to get herself out of the hospital and back home. She did manage to do the interview with the film-maker, and rescheduled the two new interviews. But she had to admit that further travel wasn't an option, and allowed Barb (OLOHP interviewer and close friend) to do the Dallas presentation.

A few weeks later, it was "rinse-and-repeat," as she was back in the hospital again with pneumonia and COVID. She fought it for almost a month, determined to get home again, but this time it got the better of her. It's been a huge loss for all of us.

What did Arden leave undone? Not much. That isn't to say she wouldn't have loved more time to do more of everything. But as far as her bucket list went, there was only one big thing left without a checkmark next to it: Arden had always wanted to drive a piece of earth-moving equipment, such as a bulldozer.

I think we can speak for most everyone who knew her: Arden should have checked the bulldozer off her list, because she did move earth – she changed the landscape of thousands of lives, not just for those who knew her personally. For many of those who counted her as a friend, she reshaped our future.



*All of this special issue of the OLOHP Insider is devoted to Arden: photos, testimonials, bits of info about her and her role in the Project, and excerpts from various interviews and articles.*

**When asked about her early life, Arden said:**

I was a tomboy, and a Daddy's girl. He was a warm, very gentle, nurturing man. Mom was extremely brilliant, a perfectionist, and a controlling person. When I didn't fall into the traditional, little girl type interests, I had a sister eleven months behind me, who filled the bill. That was good. It took the pressure off me. So most of my nurturing, while I was growing up came from my father.

I liked to play the boy's games. I usually beat them at all of them. I always had all their marbles in my bucket. I could skate, and I could hit the ball as well as most of the boys, so I was just one of them. My sister was playing with dolls, learning to cook, and doing all the traditional things that girls are supposed to learn as they grow up. She fit the mold, which was wonderful, because Mother had someone to work with. She didn't hassle me too much, other than when I ruined my clothes.



**About her earliest awareness of her attractions to women:**

I was madly, completely, totally, helplessly in love with my junior high gym teacher. I know she was a lesbian. I have no doubts of it. She was kind and gentle. And she was a mother substitute. I had a consuming feeling for her. She didn't encourage me. She didn't reject me. She was my first overwhelming emotional experience.

**Life in junior high and high school:**

We had what are today called "sleepovers." We had pajama parties. A bunch of girls get together, you know, and I can remember sitting there and I never could participate because I wasn't in their shoes. My shoes were different and I did not understand what they thought was worth giggling about and the topic always was the boys. Well I was the proper age for it, too. But it did not resonate with me.

And I dated. I even got myself engaged, but fortunately got out of that before I screwed up a couple of lives. But I would go home after this pajama party thing where all these girls were having such a fine time and I was sitting over there listening to it and wondering what was going on, you know. And I shared that with my dad and he said, "Well, the right thing will happen at the right time for you." And I've dutifully dated and didn't like it. And so I became kind of introverted because like a square peg in a round hole all the time, you know. Anyway, it really helped getting my a-ha, you know, having all these things kind of settle in for each other. Yeah. It's a lonely existence out there sometimes.



**Beginning to figure things out while in college:**

I was on the badminton team, and I was in synchronized swimming. I was exposed to lots of folk doing lots of things. I met the woman who would become my first lover. She was a senior and I was a freshman. That was a no-no. They definitely frowned on fraternizing between that level. We managed and in turn ... We didn't even live in the same dorm. Everybody lived in dorms then.

Once I got a little more comfortable with myself and who I was, it's a wonder they didn't throw me out. I was like a kid in a candy store, I was so happy.

It was wonderful to realize that I wasn't the only one in the world, that there wasn't something wrong with me. We had friends like us. We were accepted. But it was very difficult, and secrecy was a must. You had to be so careful. We had purges back in those days. Kids would leave campus on weekends, and on Monday, we'd discover all these people who should be back there at school, were not. It didn't take documentation or proof. All it took was somebody that said somebody was "queer." There would be whole groups that would disappear, as many as 50 one weekend my freshman year. You had to be careful. It puts you underground. It was said that every dorm had a person who was watching, gathering information. This was in 1949 and 1950.

## Sharing about meeting Tre, an acquaintance in college, who forever changed Arden's life:

We were just visiting. Of course, here I was a freshman, newly out to myself as a lesbian, with this awesome person. I ended up sitting on one bed, while she sat on the other. How I feel today about myself comes directly from that one day visit in that room with that person. She told me that the way I am is the way I am because God put me here. It has nothing to do with anything anybody did to me. It is simply who I am. She gave me a sense of inner peace that day that I have carried all my life. Tre was only at TSCW (Texas State College for Women) that summer. I was lucky enough for this person to pass through my life when I first discovered a name for my sexuality. I never felt bad about who I was, but I was at peace about the whole thing after that afternoon with Tre.



## Life with her first long-term partner, Tommy:

Women's softball, back then, was fast pitch. We are talking about fine athletics! Tommie was eight years older than me. She was awesome, a legend in her time, and that made it difficult for her and for us. We started living together in the fall of 1952. There was a very definite acceptable code of conduct and behavior that was assigned. It wasn't that Tommie wore men's clothes. She didn't. She was feminine. But there were things that I would not have thought about doing when the two of us were out in public. I didn't drive, and I never paid the bill at a restaurant. She took care of the money when we were out, and also the family money. I had input, but she took care of the finances. I was the saving person. We had skills that complemented each other.

We had a friendship circle. Every Friday night, we'd have a steak fry in the park. Sometimes we traveled together. We helped each other maintain our homes. We painted and repaired and did all of our own tree pruning and our own yard work. So we were busy. We did not do the bars – couldn't. I knew very little about the gay community. I knew there was a gay community. I knew there were bars and my partner, in her earlier years, I think she had sowed a lot of oats in the bars and stuff like that. So she was really not interested and I was in public school work. If I'd have been caught in a bar or party, I'd have lost my job and never had another. So I wasn't interested enough to run the risk. Just couldn't. This was the years of raids. People would be at a private party and police would come and they'd round up everybody and take them in and book them. Sometimes names would be in the newspaper. If they could raid a private residence, you just didn't dare do the bars. So we depended on our friendship groups.

## On leaving her job in public education at age 50:

Back in the early 70s, a ninth grade boy came floating into my office one day and sat and visited. He left and then he appeared again. It didn't take too long to figure out that we had a young gay boy and he was in some real distress. I couldn't out myself. There was no place to refer him to. I sure couldn't tell my boss because she'd have gone to his folks in a heartbeat and I couldn't betray him. So we spent his whole ninth grade year, him floating in and out. He finally got to where we talked about it. He had not shared it with his parents. I told him – well, there might come a time when he would be comfortable in doing that, but he was always welcome, of course to come in and visit. He went on to high school and was a fine student. Then he went to University of Texas at Austin for his freshman year. There, he took his life. It just was the final straw with a whole bunch of things that had been happening in my life and I started into a meltdown. I had enough snap to know what was happening, and I was pretty sure why. I didn't assume guilt. I just always wondered if there might have been one little something I could have said that would have made a difference for him in that final decision. So anyway, I got me a good psychiatrist and I went into therapy. I was in therapy two years and never missed a day of work. My coworkers all knew what was happening and they covered for me those two years. They were right there for me. Another kind of job in the schools would not have made any difference, what we needed was for me to be away from the public school environment. I went out on disability with 30 years in public school work. I was only 50 years old. So here I am again, young, for what I'm facing. So it started a whole new life for me.





### **On the loss of Tommie:**

We had a good life. Like anybody who makes a life together, two women, two men, or a man and a woman, it doesn't matter. There are good times, and hard times. We had all of that. Nothing is ever perfect. We truly loved one another. We cared about one another. It was a warm, gentle 33 years of my life.

### **When asked about being closeted until much later in her adult life:**

There are thousands of lesbians over 55 years of age in Houston, but it is a very invisible population. Pure survival dictated that you lead a double life. You had your true you, your pure self, that was a very invisible life. Then you had the life that our culture says you must live. All of the women in my friendship circle felt the same way. These women are still in my life. Some of them have been in relationships for 48 to 50 years, and they are still closeted. And you become more and more isolated as you get older, as your contacts diminish.



### **On building a life after Tommie's death:**

I had this nagging feeling that this thing I wanted to do – to set up a support group for older lesbians – might be self-serving. I was talking with Matile while on a trip to California. We'd had a long visit and she knew something of my background. She said, "Oh, I don't think so. I think what I am hearing is the birth of a social conscience." It was a startling thing to hear. I said, "If, indeed, that is what it is, isn't it bad that it came so late?" Matile answered, "It's not so late. It's at the right time in your life."

That trip was one of the biggest turning points of my life. Immediately, back in Houston, I put together a team of people involved in various aspects of gerontology. I was the only person over 50, and the group had to spend some time and effort consciousness-raising around age, so that it wasn't the young people telling the old people what they should do, or what was best for them.

### **About a conversation with her grandmother:**

My step-grandmother was always the light of my life. She was just the most wonderful human being ever blessed upon us. We had breakfast one morning, and she said to me, "Honey, now I'm going to ask you something, and you don't have to answer me." I told her, "Okay." Then she said, "Are you looking for another Tommie?" I told her, "No, because there's not another one out there. And I promise you one thing: if there ever is anybody in my life again that is important enough that I would make a home with her, I will bring her to you." "Good."

### **On her new life with Charlotte:**

What is wonderful in Charlotte's and my relationship, is that together we have been finding this activist path. Our sensibilities tend to be along the same lines. The primary attraction between Charlotte and me is on a spiritual level. The spiritual aspect was never present in all the years I was with Tommie.

It's wonderful to have this. Not to discount other times of my life, but this period has involved more change in a faster period of time. Once, when traveling, it just happened to coincide with a march, when 30,000 people marched on the capital. That was our first experience in something like that. We never got over it. If you ever get involved in something like that, it forever changes how you feel about things, and what you're willing to do.



Later, when I had cancer, from the very first day, Charlotte and I were out to every medical person involved in my care. It was great not to have to watch pronouns, and to be unconditionally accepted. When the worst was over, we went to the Davis Mountains, in west Texas. This had always been a favorite spot for both of us. Friends met us there, including one who was an ordained minister. We found a spot in the mountains where we had our commitment ceremony. It was not something we had talked much about until my journey with cancer.



### **When asked in her 60s about the future:**

I would like to see old women feel good about being old. I would like to see old women take back their power. I would like to see the women of my social group here in Houston work on the terrible issues of their internalized homophobia, and deal with the issues of being an old lesbian, and deal with the word 'lesbian.' It's been so stigmatized. I would like to see the women of our lifestyle deal with their own spiritual loss. There is so much stuff about sin and homosexuality. I would like to see women realize that the punishment we feel has been created by men. All our laws have been made by men. All our churches have been created by men. All the things that make us feel less than we really are, that is the result of those things. I would have them be comfortable with being women, being lesbian and, being old.

### **Talking about starting her Herstory work:**

I was looking at discovering information on how women were finding each other. We all agreed, mutually, that there certainly wasn't any information network out there. We didn't have periodicals and organizations like we have today. So that began to form the information I was looking for and focusing on women who were born before 1930, in the teens and the twenties. It was just amazing, some of the things they did to find one another. That too, evolved, from the very beginning. I just got more focused on... not to exclude others, but trying to find these women who were born earlier.

Age 70 became kind of a magic thing. I have interviewed women who were younger, whose stories I felt were really important to have in the collection. For instance, somebody who had been hospitalized in a mental hospital and given "the cure," so to speak. There's a lot of women who have experienced that and not many who will talk about it. That becomes an important part of our lesbian history. So the age 70 thing, I still use as kind of a benchmark for people I'm looking for.

### **Talking with Margaret about beginning interviewing for the Project:**

A: I think my first one was probably in '98. That interview was with Marie Mariano, here in Houston. That was a learning experience! And since then, there has been a refining of the way I work with them. There's been a change in the kind of questions I ask them. She was, of course, wide open and receptive, so it was not a problem. But that is not always the case.

M: For some reason, I was under the impression that you were somewhat motivated because you had given your own interview.

A: No. I even forgot about that. I was well into the Project and somebody said, "Well, Arden. Have you been interviewed?" And I said, "No." And then I remembered, after the fact, that I had agreed to do an interview with a friend of a mature student at the University of Houston who was in the women's studies program. Her assignment was to do an oral history. The professor had told them now, these people need to have a history and that they certainly don't if they're 21! She approached me, asking if I would do an interview. I told her sure. She said she needed to be sure that it would be acceptable to



interview a lesbian. She didn't want to screw up a grade with homophobia. But it was fine. That happened in 1990. We did the interview and she gave me a copy of the paper that she turned in that brought her an A+. I had stuck it in a filing cabinet and I had forgotten about it. So that, the 1990 interview, was the basis for the first part of what later became my Herstory book.

### **When asked “As you interview, is it hard not to interject comments that are really yours?”**

My goodness. Not anymore. Oh, my. But the first two or three? When I saw them in written form, I thought, “Well who the hell’s interview is this exactly?” With Marie, she’s saying something and I’d say, “Oh, yes.” Then I’d give my parallel experience. The first two or three interviews, I thought, “Oh, Arden.” It’s too easy to do interject your own experience, but once you’re aware of what you’re doing... the embarrassment of giving a transcript like that back to somebody to edit! I don’t think so! So you learn. I make notes so when we have a little break or we finish, I say, “You said something about...” But oh, yes. I sure did a lot of talking at first.

### **When once asked, “Do you have to feel people out about using terms like gay or lesbian?”**

Oh yeah. That tells me where they are and how they feel about themselves and, to some extent, if there is internalized homophobia we have to work around. For the most part, unless they were living in urban areas where there was gay activism going on, San Francisco or New York, most of these women were “gay women.” They weren’t lesbians. I know that I was a gay woman. Then when Tommie, my first long-term partner, died in 1985 and I starting osmosing into a new persona, I became... I started hearing the words lesbian and dyke... and just as I have embraced the words, not as something pejorative but as a strong person, a strong women.

You see there are so many who haven’t done that. They haven’t had to. I had to do something. So yes. The word queer is not a good one. Dyke is not a good one. I slip and use that word sometimes. I have to be careful.



### **Sharing a few general thoughts about the women in the OLOHP:**

I think the women that have volunteered, they’re doing an exceptional service. There are some buzz words that will pretty much tell you about the level of homophobia. One is, “I’m a very private person.” Another is, “We don’t use labels.”

I would say there was almost no one whose story is in this collection, who would say that their lesbianism was the essence of who they were. It’s just a part of who they are.

It’s one thing to be comfortable and live with who you choose, not revealing yourself unnecessarily, and it’s quite another to say, “This is who I am.” And it’s another to see their story in print in their Herstory.

So I have a lot of friends here who will not do an interview with me, women who weren’t late bloomers, but are life long lesbians. Some women who came out later struggled with identity and sexuality. Sometimes, people like me, who popped out of the womb this way, have the most internalized homophobia. There are lots of reasons for this to happen. A lot of it is religion, of course. We’re socialized in a manner, some of it is cultural.

Some of these women... Heavens! They played softball! They have big friendship groups, big social groups. And they think nobody knows.

### **Quote from article by Arden in *Sinister Wisdom* about a decade back:**

Frequently, when approached for an interview, a woman will say “but I have never done anything.” And my response to her is, “But you have. You have lived to old age and flourished in a hostile environment.” And once her book is complete she is surprised by the accomplishments in her life. I am continually amazed by the strength and ingenuity of our old sisters. And I am in awe of the obstacles many have overcome. I am feeling an increasing sense of urgency as the women of this generation are fast disappearing. I am still searching for lesbians born before 1930, but work with many a bit younger. So, the work continues.

### **When asked, “Have you always had a goal or a sense of what it is you want to come from the Project?” Arden replied:**

It just happened. As this thing grew and as I started getting more and more of these completed stories and somebody says, “Why don’t you write a book?” I think, “Sure, Arden! I’m gonna’ write a book?” Well, you know, that again is something that has just happened. The Project just kind of took on a life of its own. It was nothing that I ever envisioned, for God’s sake!

The sense of urgency never leaves, as this generation of amazing women disappear. It’s important that these women become a documented part of our history.



## Remembering Arden By Barb Kucharczyk

Really? Remembering Arden.... how does one even forget the woman who said, "You are my family now" when both of my birth parents were gone? One does not. Period.

Arden came into my sphere in 1987, 35 years ago. I'm older now than she was then. Arden and Charlotte taught me to lie on a dock and fish for crab with chicken necks on a string. They introduced me to the Houston Comets, WNBA Champions, and Cat Osterman, professional softball pitcher, the Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City, RVing Women, crystal digging in the red clay of Arkansas, the list goes on...



the coast of Maine, the Albuquerque Hot Air Balloon Fiesta and a week with Lucie Blue and Pat in Nova Scotia where we drank wine and painted rocks for our own cairn.

Arden received many accolades during her life, in large part for doing what she did best: caring about others. LOAF, OLOC and the OLOHP: They were all about caring for others, providing sister-



hood, and preserving the life stories of Old Lesbians. I was never so proud as when she finally said, "Comhere, Sugah, let's do your story so you can do others'."

When Arden was recognized as a 2014 Woman of Courage and Commitment in Washington, DC, she smoothly hobnobbed with high powered folk, winning them over by just being Arden. At the Department of Energy, she received their Women's Trailblazer Award...notice her company on the wall poster behind her! Tammy Duckworth, Arden, Michelle Obama ;-).

We were all "Sugah" to Arden, but every time she called you that, in the moment it felt like your name only. She taught many of us how to attend, to listen, to learn, to love freely. I learned "the difference between sic-um and comhere," and she got the last laugh when she slept with the Colonel.

I love you Arden. I rejoice with your memories and honor your legacy.

I REMEMBER YOU, Arden, ALWAYS.



## *Messages About Arden*

Thank you, Arden for the love, mentoring and sharing of your life with me. I am humbled by your strength of character, your unwavering commitment to being all that your soul set before you. I miss you dear friend. Now Lord, guide her safely Home. Beatrice (one of Arden's Tribe in Houston)

It is a loss for all of us. We knew it was coming, and yet it is still a loss and a big sadness in our hearts. She was a good friend to me since 1985 or 86 when I met her at Golden Threads in P'Town. And then we were on the OLOC board for a few years in 1995-96 together. We worked on the OLOHP (Herstory Project) together for many years. So she was a big part of my activism around what it is to be OLD. I will miss her tireless energies and her attention to detail. I learned good interviewing skills from her. I will miss her deeply.

Treasure Yourselves, Edie

Arden made my life better. She had a confidence in me that I didn't have myself – and nobody had ever been so sure of it or brought it to my attention. If I said, "Oh, I don't know if I can do that," she'd say, "Yes you can." I believed her and would work harder because I did not want to disappoint.

I always looked to her for advice and strength. She could be startlingly truthful at times and it was always appreciated. She always delivered this with her wry humor and we usually both got a good laugh. I did so love that woman.

Judy Woods

Arden, I am so inspired by your pioneer spirit, your strength, and your wisdom. Thank you for sharing your light and empowering others to do the same.

Meghan [the documentarian who interviewed Arden in late September]

Arden Eversmeyer realized and accepted her love for women while still a teenager. For nearly half her life she led a closeted life; at the time lesbians were expelled from schools and fired from jobs because of their sexuality.

Because I said yes to her, I have my lesbian Herstory in the archives of a major university. Thank you Arden for preserving our stories, gratitude for her support to all the women to be out and proud.

Rebbe TZipi Radonski



I was able to meet and talk with her at the interviewers event in Madison. It is a memory that I will always treasure. Love to all of you who will feel the big hole in your heart without her lively spirit.

Sharon S.

Deep condolences and blessings to the Lesbians associated with Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project. Arden Eversmeyer – co-founder and mover/shaker – has passed away.

Her contribution and dedication to creating such a vibrant project and archiving hundreds of Herstories of Lesbians over the age of 70 has been truly remarkable – and greatly important. She will be missed by all.

Mev Miller, Wanderground Lesbian Archive

JD Doyle, a friend and fellow Texan and activist in the LGBTQ community, has gathered and posted a variety of articles about Arden. You can access those articles by navigating to <http://texasobituaryproject.org> and entering Arden Eversmeyer in the search bar.



**Jean Arden Eversmeyer**  
**What She Left Undone yet Not Left Undone**

I was thinking of you, Arden, and the grocery shopping you and Barb did so that you wouldn't need to shop for several weeks.  
And how you loved to cook,  
How you joyfully spoke of looking forward  
To the cooking and eating all the goodies you'd bought  
For your breakfasts, lunches, and dinners  
Now, left undone.

You often spoke of your race to outlive your  
95-year-old mother by a day.  
Now, left undone.

Your weekend visits to your friend, June  
Because neither of you had living relatives.  
Now, left undone.

And yet

Building healthy, mentoring relationships  
Throughout the world and especially in the LGBTQ  
community  
You did not leave undone.

Setting the stories and names of lesbians of all  
Races, all religions and backgrounds  
Into Herstorical history  
You did not leave undone.

All the minds and hearts of the young and the old  
Whom you helped in some way  
To courageously set sail upon this perilous and wonderous ocean of life.  
You did not leave undone.

But for your love and hard work...  
Your friendship making and wisdom shared...  
your ability to bring organized order out of chaos,  
Many 'Good works' have not gone undone.

Now, O 'Lord, our sister Arden's work on earth is done.  
We commend her loving soul into your infinite bosom  
Where she continues her work on Higher level  
Still bringing forth wonders done.



*Beatrice and Arden in Nova Scotia in August*

## What Arden Meant to Me by Mary Henry

I'm a late bloomer. It wasn't until I was in my forties that I began to suspect my true nature – as Arden would put it, when I finally got my Aha! Even then, after I'd fallen in love with Margaret, it was years before we could put a name to it. As is often the case with big discoveries, my life was upended and I spent a decade determining what to do with it, and how to switch gears mid-life.

The wonderful lesbian community in the Twin Cities showed me there was a world out there that my southern upbringing had hidden under every kind of euphemism and distraction imaginable. I met lesbians who were some of the most outstanding women I had ever come across in any capacity. They welcomed me, mentored me, and pushed me out to use what they had just taught me.

That push took me to a multi-day meeting of the OLOC Steering Committee that was held in Minneapolis. They were seeking local help to produce a national Gathering and a friend, Annalee Stewart, dragged me along. It was there that I met Arden. As



Co-Director of OLOC, she painted an ambitious outline of the event and what would need to be done – location, program, speakers, agenda, honors and memorials... My head was spinning. She was welcoming, friendly, dynamic, funny and very determined.

### Excerpt from an article in the Houston Chronicle by Sam González Kelly, on Nov. 30, 2022

Retirement, for many, is a time to kick up your feet and enjoy the hard-earned comforts of life after decades in the labor force. For Jean Arden Eversmeyer, retirement was when her life's work really started. The prominent activist, who went by Arden, died on Nov. 14 at 91, leaving behind a legacy as a powerful leader and advocate for lesbians in Houston, specifically the elderly. Her work provided vital connections for older lesbians, who were often disconnected from support. A University of Houston librarian who specializes in the field said she had “an enormous impact on LGBTQ+ history across several decades and for some of us, an impact in our lives personally. Over many years, Arden brought people together to preserve, share, and reflect on LGBTQ+ community history.”

Partway thru the meetings I learned that Arden was in treatment for cancer. That was why she was wearing something on her head all the time. Her hair was gone! What? This woman was that ill and working this hard without any requests for special treatment? Not making any mention of her needs? Wow!

As that weekend progressed, and in all the time I knew her throughout the rest of her life, she was the same warm, open, hardworking, empathetic person I met then. At first, you might think she was selfless, but no. She knew how to play with that same gusto, taking well-deserved breaks to go to concerts, socialize, and travel. That's something Arden taught me as well, the need to make sure you take care of yourself and not be overwhelmed by all that needs to be done.

Arden met you where you were and worked with who you were, not what you were, or even thought you were. She greeted all new friends as partners in whatever work needed doing at the moment and then you were a friend for life. She loved her community and doing what she could to share it with others, living the golden rule, “Do for others as you would have them do for you.”

She so loved her friends and community that she started the OLOHP out of her belief that each of them, and their stories, should be remembered, even if they had no biological family they could count on to keep it. The remarkable treasure trove that is the Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project would not be if it were not for Arden. As that late bloomer who knew almost nothing, I am beyond grateful that she accomplished this for us, for all those who know nothing of what life was like for lesbians and who tried to make it before there were the resources we all now take for granted.

I know that she and Margaret had planned to interview each other as the capstone stories for the Project at its 25th Anniversary next year. I hope that a plan can be made to have some sort of third party “interview” for Arden anyway, where everyone can share their Arden stories! I'll speak here for myself: She was a gentle, but determined force of nature.

## *A Few More Messages About Arden*

### **From Aganita, a Transcriber and Interviewer**

I first met Arden when I was very new to the Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project and was one of the readers at the OLOC Regional Gathering in Tacoma in 2011. I also saw her occasionally when she visited Puget Sound, and I went to at least one Vancouver Folk Music Festival with her and Charlotte along with Mary and Margaret. Still she kept pretty much to herself, so I knew her, but never knew her really well.

As a transcriber for OLOHP, I did get to transcribe some of Arden's interviews and got some insights into her thinking by her questions and the things she would comment on. I think she probably talked more about herself in some of the followup interviews she was doing shortly before she died. I am very glad to have known her, albeit only a little, and to be involved in the wonderful project she started.



*Margaret and Arden visiting Smith College*

### **From Margaret**

When I picked up my cell phone the other day and noticed Arden's name listed in the recent calls, the fact that I could no longer simply give her a call made her passing all the more real.

I'll share with you what I told her on a regular basis: I will forever be grateful – not just introducing me to the Project, but for her willingness to let me, someone she barely knew, help her. When we met, she'd already established the Project and had basically run it single-handedly for years. I'm not sure there was a selfish bone in Arden's body. It was incredibly generous for Arden to let not just me in, but a small cadre of others, letting us all be a part of the Project in various ways, big or small. It wasn't like I wasn't already busy when I first met her and got involved. I was. But I feel as if I didn't realize my life was missing a larger, meaningful focus beyond myself. She showed me how rewarding it could be to take work on something like the OLOHP, helping to create a legacy that will live on well beyond us.

Over the years, my partner Mary and I spent weeks at a time with Arden (and Charlotte) in Houston. They also traveled our way and spent time with us in the Puget Sound. At times, we'd meet up other places, both for work, and to play. She had a rare talent: she never made you feel like you were a guest in her home – you always felt like you were just a part of the household. Better yet, when she spent time with us, she was the same way, going with the flow, willing to jump right into anything, but just as willing and as happy to sit on the deck with a book and read.

Yes, she will be missed, but given how much of herself she left behind, it won't be like the others who have passed thru my life. Arden is still, and will always be, a part of my daily life.

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

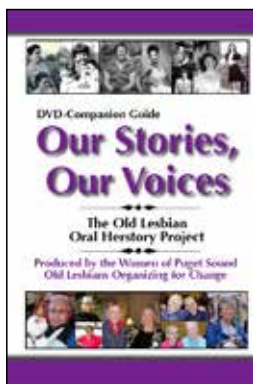


### **How can you be involved in the OLOHP?**

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.



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