

The OLOHP Insider

February 2013

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

Issue 17



The Reach of the OLOHP

Over the years, we've been struck by how the Project has reached out to touch so many people in so many ways. A recent exchange with Hazel reminded us just how true that is.

Hazel had heard us talk about being behind on transcriptions, and short on money. She had some free time, was a decent typist, and was willing to try transcribing a short interview for us as a donation. After working with Hazel on how we prefer it done, and lending her a foot pedal to control the playback, she gave it a go. She had just finished that first transcription when she wrote:

I "replay" (in my head) things that were said and mull them over, thinking about all the whole feminist and lesbian movement that passed me by while I was sunken into my role as a military wife – being a mother, being the proper wife, and being a bread-winner for much of that time. When I first came out, I awakened to the whole feminist movement, read and read feminist literature, and entered a whole new paradigm. Now I get to pursue it further in doing this transcribing. I get a front row seat for "This Is Your Life" for these heroic women. Thank you for this opportunity.

Hazel thought after she'd finished the first one, that it would be enough. Even a short interview takes hours to transcribe. But less than two weeks later, Hazel wrote. She'd tried to go back to reading the mysteries that she loved that had occupied some of her free time, but she couldn't stop thinking about the women, their voices and their stories. So she offered to take on another, even longer file. And then asked for another. In the midst of the third transcription, she wrote this...

I just wanted to share with you how much it means to me to have a part in preserving these women's stories. I am transcribing tonight, and these lines brought me to tears: "What I didn't realize was, if you aren't authentically able to present yourself... I'm not talking about pride or anything like that... if you're not authentically able to live who you are, what you are, it does something to you deeply."

The Project will continue to use our regular transcriptionist as often as we can afford. She is great and is much quicker than our volunteers. We know from our conversations with her that she, too, gets a lot out of the experience of being immersed in a woman's story as she types. But we've come to think differently about our volunteers. It's no longer about their helping us save money. Hazel has helped us clearly see the immense value of sharing this experience with the transcriber, a value that equals, if not outweighs, having the transcriptions done quickly.

Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older

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\$49.99! We Were Shocked, A Bit Flattered, and More

We were confused when we received an email from a woman whose Aunt Lois's story was included in our first book, *A Gift of Age*. Her husband knew she wanted a copy of our latest book, *Without Apology* as a Christmas gift. As most people would do, he had gone online in search of a copy to order. The example on the right, is probably what he found when he entered the book title in a search engine.

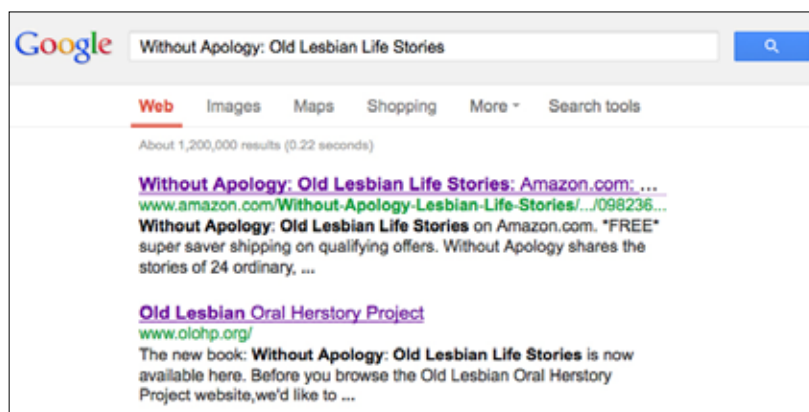
Lois's niece had written because she thought we would want to know that Amazon was charging \$49.99 for our book when the price printed on the back indicated it sold for \$19.95. She was right...we did want to know.

Most confusing was that we do not offer the book through Amazon. While we could list our book at Amazon, and other online book retailers, we have opted not to, preferring instead to fill orders ourselves. We need every dime we earn on book sales to help us continue doing our work!

Clicking on the first source on the search result led to a new copy being sold for \$49.99 plus shipping at Amazon.com, a trusted retailer with which almost all of us have done business. Clicking on the next listing in the search shown above would have brought the buyer to our site where the book is available for \$19.95.

How does this happen? Amazon does fill many of its book orders from warehouses, but it also serves as a middleman, with connections to a sea of vendors large and small, selling everything from ink cartridges, to food processors to folding ladders, and hundreds of thousands of other products. It's a great service and can save you hours of time and lots of money. The result is that almost anyone can sign up to have a "storefront" on Amazon's website. While Amazon has some oversight, these small vendors are free to list whatever they can legally sell.

When you look at any item on Amazon, you can follow a link to see who is actually selling it. In this case, there were two vendors offering *Without Apology*, both at \$49.99. With



a few more clicks, you can see what else those vendors have listed at Amazon. Both list a variety of used, and a few new, books. We have no idea where they get copies of our books. For whatever reason, they felt they could ask 250% of the price of a new copy directly from us.

For a brief moment, the fact that someone was willing to pay that much for our books was flattering. But it only took a few minutes to before that feeling turned to anger – anger that a customer paid that much, and that, short of signing up and giving Amazon a cut on every book we sell through them, there isn't anything we can do about it... unless maybe you have some suggestions for us.



Lois Heindselman, featured in *A Gift of Age*

Mixing It Up a Bit...

Regular readers will probably ask, "Where are Arden's musings that are always on the first page of the newsletter?" Don't worry, they'll be back in their rightful place in the next issue. Arden has been incredibly busy. And you'll probably all sympathize when we tell you she's also in the throes of a computer upgrade... and we chose the word throes intentionally since, about now, she may be thinking that throwing it out the second story window might be a reasonable option.

Excerpts from Mary Lou's Herstory

- N: Everywhere I went, there she was, the Sweet Adelines, school... she had pursued me for, I don't know, over a year. There would be flowers on my desk at school, little notes.
- I: Alright!
- N: (Chuckling) I was in the Sweet Adelines and she joined the Sweet Adelines. Wherever I was, she appeared. She took a job as music assistant so she could pop in and out of the schools. I came home from work one day. It must have been near the end of the school year. You know how tough those days can be. I had just gotten rid of the husband, at last got him out of the house. Peace at last! There was this cake on the table. I don't know... I went out the back... she was staying at her grandmother's house, which was next door to mine. I pounced over there, going through the back yard, and yelled... "Hey Marsha. Get out here! What do you mean? What is wrong with you! What do you want anyway?"
- I: Did you have any inkling what was going on?
- N: No. No.
- I: Because you're long past those college dalliances and you're thinking about your kids?
- N: I know she's different, that she's lesbian... but I don't know if we can use that word... everybody knows she was.
- I: But you weren't thinking about that for yourself.
- N: No. It was a beautiful day and I'm a raving maniac. Why? I don't know.
- I: Something is going on underneath, but anyway. (chuckling)
- N: She says, "Well, when you like someone, you like to do nice things for them." Then I, of course, felt like an idiot and calmed down. Not much was said, but it was there. She'd come over and we'd sit on the glider out on the porch and things warmed up, and bingo... she brought me to... lesbian life. (laughing)
- I: Were you still teaching at this time?
- N: Yes. I was scared out of my mind. I was frightened to death. Here I was a highly respected teacher.
- I: Because this was... I think you told me it was about 1985?
- N: I was plenty scared.
- I: Did anybody ever out you, or discuss it?
- N: No. The truth is, I even referred to her as my partner. Of course, we were business partners. I think they all just assumed we were... I'm going to say as far as I know, many of them just assumed that we were just business partners. Because of the age difference, I'm sure. They all knew... well, not all, but a lot of people knew Marsha was different, gay or whatever.
- I: So in 1985, that's well into the... in fact, by that time, the organized women's movement stuff is beginning to drop off.
- N: I was so scared. "What am I getting myself into?" I wouldn't let her move in. She bought a trailer and put it way back there on her grandmother's property.
- I: Did she eventually move in with you?
- N: Yes, she'd say she wanted to wake up in the morning and see me. And go to bed at night and see me. (chuckling)

Mary Lou Perkins

*born October 1927
interviewed at age 84*



Age 6



Eighth Grade Graduation



Dancing, in her late 70's

Passings

It's been another difficult few months as three women who had shared their stories with us died.



Marlene Feingold

*Born 1931, died November 2012
Long time New York City resident
Interviewed at age 75*



Elaine Weber

*Born 1925, died January 2013
An institution in Florida
Interviewed at age 82*

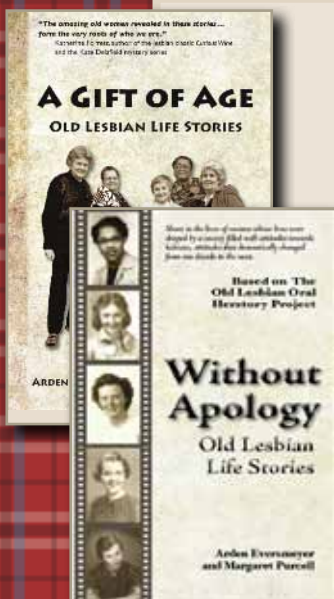


Lois Applegate

*Born 1928, died February 2013
Lifelong resident of Ohio
Interviewed at age 82*

We've also just learned of two others who had died a while ago, but word had not gotten to us. The photo on the right is Pat Coleman – we don't know how long ago she died. Pat was born in 1925. She was interviewed in California at age 82.

The other woman we'll simply refer to as Jane Doe. Born in 1924, she sat and spoke with Arden at age 75. Jane gave us a wonderful interview and lived a rich life filled with friends and family that knew she was a lesbian. Yet when she signed a contract with the Project, Jane wrote, "Can't be used." Since it was such a definitive statement, we feel we can't even share her name. Unfortunately, she's not not the only woman who has shared her story with us, but not felt safe enough to let others know of her experiences. Jane Doe's story will be kept for research purposes and her identity protected as she asked, but it felt important for us to mention her.



How can you be involved in the OLOHP?

Lesbians 70 years of age and older can tell their own story. Contact us.

If you don't "qualify", encourage older lesbian friends to contact us.

Buy our books.*

Donate a copy of our book to your local library.

Make a tax-deductible donation to support the Project.**

Send us a note of encouragement!

* *A Gift of Age: Old Lesbian Life Stories* and *Without Apology: Old Lesbian Life Stories* can be ordered at www.olohp.org

** Tax-deductible donations can be made to The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project either by mailing a check (address on page 1) or going to our website and using the PayPal/Donate Now button.

A special thanks to OLOC, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, www.oloc.org, for their ongoing support.