

# The OLOHP Insider

1st Issue for 2017

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project



*In light of all that is going on around us every day, it feels appropriate to use this space to share photos of two of the many, many activists in the Project, women who have been showing up, standing up and speaking up for decades.*



## *Arden's Musings*

Travel has been a big part of our lives the past 20 years, and both Charlotte and I love it. I have told Margaret Purcell many times that I had all the fun and she did all the work. But as much as we love travel (in 2015 we had ten trips), we were both pooped. Overall, 2016 was a bit easier. It started with a training class in Arizona and also included a second trip for an interviewer training class we offered in connection with the National Women's Music Festival in Madison, Wisconsin. In August, Charlotte had a health challenge that put her in the hospital for a week. That served as a big reminder that it was time to "refocus" my life. I needed to stay more focused on our own health and needs. We spent much of last fall in a steady recovery for both of us... and then we both got the itch to travel again.

Old age has changed our mode of travel – we are now 87 and 86. Where once we were on the road in the motor home or car, and only occasionally by air, we now routinely fly. Now-a-days, we make sure we take advantage of the assistance, such as wheelchairs, available at the airports. And rent a car at our destination, which is much less tiring for me since I do all the driving now.

Feeling better after taking those few months to focus more on ourselves, January saw us in Florida for two weeks. During this trip I did five interviews, presented two workshops (at the Silver Threads conference and at the Resort on Carefree Boulevard community), trained a new interviewer, and participated in the 80th birthday celebration for one of our interviewers. It was all great, but the frosting on the cake was the time spent with friends we have made through the Project. This was our fifth trip to various parts of Florida for the Project. We are back home now in Houston, and in the groove again, doing more interviews in Texas and taking the occasional trip to a special event.

I still love meeting these wonderful women who will share their life stories with me. Don't take me wrong – I'm not done yet. But I am doing things a bit differently now, not trying to do it all, letting some opportunities to do workshops and such pass by, and not worrying if I don't get it all done today. There is an amazing team of women willing and able to help with the Project now. Knowing that lets me relax more. But as I said earlier, I'm not done... for now, my motto is still, "Have recorder - will travel."

For this issue of the *Insider*, we've asked Gloria, who has worked with the Project for years and years, to share her thoughts on interviewing. We hope to add articles from various interviewers and volunteers in future issues as well. Enjoy.

*Arden*

*Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older*

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## *The Art (Craft?) of Interviewing*

I have had enough lead time on writing this piece for *The Insider* to reminisce about nearly 20 years of interviewing. I have chuckled at some of the bone-headed comments I have made and questions I have asked, but I think I have improved my skills over the years and am always open to useful critique.

One lesson that I learned early on was that I do not do well interviewing a couple together or allowing a partner to “sit in” on an interview. When I did, there were invariably differences of opinion or perception of events. If the partner is 69 or older, I offer to do a separate interview. It is helpful to have a quiet space with few distractions.

I also find it helpful to make voice contact with the interviewee several times before the actual recording.

A good way to do this might be to call the person after she has received her introductory packet and ask if she has any immediate questions.

If I can try to set a friendly tone and establish at least a minimal relationship before the recording, I feel more confident. If all the preliminaries are done and the process explained... the contract is signed, the transcribing and editing phases explained and the request for pictures and documents understood... the actual interview and recording will usually go smoothly.

I interrupt the flow of the story if we get too far off track, but often find that most all of our questions are covered as the interviewee tells the story of her life. If I don't hear the answer to one of our questions – ‘at what age did you come out to yourself’, for example – I will ask. With practice, I am learning how to react without words to emotional stories, some positive, but others hard to hear, stories of rape, incestuous and otherwise, confinement to mental institutions and self-hatred and guilt for feeling love for another woman. I know that it is a precious privilege to be told these stories face-to-face, and hope they will not be removed when the interviewee has a chance to edit her story.

Sometimes gathering the stories has taken more than one session. We try to plan two hours in the

late morning, say 10 am to noon, then take a lunch break for an hour and finish up by 1:30. We'll then schedule a second session to get the rest of the story. At this point, we also deal with any photographs and other support documents the woman is willing to share. Usually, I package those up for Margaret to scan. Then we (or she) will return them.

With permission from the woman I'm working with, my partner, Donna Douglass, will videotape the interview. A copy of that tape will go with the transcribed version to the archives. Although we use two audio recorders to tape the interviews, the transcribers have sometimes needed to use the video to catch a word or phrase that was not clear on the audio recorders. Most of the interviewers download the audio from the recorders and transmit it to the

Project. For me, most of my job is done when I can turn the recorders over to Margaret to download.

Luckily, I live close enough to let her do that rather than downloading and sending via the internet. That's a skill I haven't yet tried to learn!

We have traveled around the Puget Sound area here in Washington state, traveling sometimes by ferry to islands only accessible by that form of transport. We have also done several interviews here in our home, when women have been here before and felt comfortable. Now that I am

housebound, I hope to be able to do a few more here at home.

I've conducted 18 interviews for the OLOHP over the years and have enjoyed, and learned from, each and every one. I'm about to try recording a telephone interview in which I will be recording directly from my phone. The old lesbian I will be interviewing lives across the Sound and could get here by ferry if she had transportation, but she is also housebound much of the time, so we've decided to try using the phones.

More about that another day.

*Gloria Stancich 1935, interviewer*

*Donna Douglass 1938, videographer*



JoAnn M. Fritsche, daughter of Mary C. Fritsche of 63 Brookmoor Rd., has graduated from Case Western Reserve University (Cleveland, Ohio) with a Ph.D. in English. Her dissertation, "Visions of Action," focuses upon Romantic conceptions of action and knowledge apparent in the major narrative poems of John Keats's "great year" (1818-1819). Ms. Fritsche is an active member of the National Organization for Women and of the National Women's Political Caucus.

From 1962-66, she taught English at Fairfax Hall, a preparatory school in Waynesboro, Va., and from 1966-69 she was an instructor in English at Longwood College, Farmville, Va. Ms. Fritsche has a B. Ed. in English from Duquesne University and an M.A.T. in English from the University of North Carolina. Her academic background includes study at Laval University, Quebec, and at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

## JoAnn Fritsche

born 1939

Interviewed 2010  
by Mary Henry and  
Margaret Purcell in  
University Place, WA



Dr. JoAnn M. Fritsche



### In response to a question about coming out in her job as Equal Opportunity Director for a university in Maine...

You had asked the question about "How did people know you were a lesbian?" The underground was tremendous. There were people all over the state who knew I was a lesbian, although I never came out making an announcement. I said to those people I trusted, "I am extremely vulnerable in my position because I have a lot of people who hate me. I have made enemies of people whom I've had to overrule including university vice presidents and presidents and deans." That comes with the territory, but the one thing they could get me on was my sexuality. There was no law to protect me. I knew that that would be the one thing – if anything could create trouble for me – it would be that. Even though I felt like a liar and I felt awful.

Before I went on the sabbatical, there was a group of lesbian and gay students. They didn't call themselves Wilde-Stein, but basically it was that kind of a group. It was clearly a support group and they wanted to do various kinds of things in the community, in the university and so on. They had asked me to come to a meeting. For obvious reasons, I did not routinely come to these meetings. They had invited me to come to the meeting because they wanted to see the words "sexual preference" put in the Equal Opportunity statement for the college and the university catalog. I was at the meeting and, one month later, I was going to be on sabbatical. I knew the manure was going to hit the fan while I was gone.

I said to them all, "Here is what I would advise. I urge you not, not, not to make this a system issue. Don't even think about bringing this to the system because it will get tied up into knots. It will never go through. Deal strictly with the president of this campus. Keep this a campus issue. If this becomes a system issue, I will not have the ability to help when I come back." And the faculty members were heavily involved and, of course, they took it to the system, and precisely what I predicted happened.

When I returned from my sabbatical the first issue on my desk was this business. The university president was upset. People had talked to him about getting this change being made in the catalog and he called me up. He said, "JoAnn. I want to let you know that I don't have problem with the words sexual orientation being included in the catalog. But I don't like the phrase 'sexual preference,' because sexual preference is illegal and immoral." He's saying this to me over the phone. I'm thinking, "Oh, shit." Of course, it's irrelevant what he thinks anyway, because it's already way beyond him anyhow. But he had to make his opinion known. Then, after the Monday morning breakfast, pursuing the same topic, he got me and said, "JoAnn, what do *those people* want anyway?!"

*Those people.* It was so hard not to say, "Arthur, I'm one of those people. I'm a nice lady who happens to be a lesbian, and a lesbian who happens to be what you think is a nice lady. Maybe I'm not so nice!" But I didn't, because I knew I needed to use him as a reference.

I was very, very afraid to come out. There were so many people who disliked me. I had many, loyal supporters who would go to bat for me about just about anything, whenever I needed them to back up some sort of wild idea that I had. I can get 40 people to get letters in to the appropriate person to do it. On the other hand, I probably had as many enemies as I had friends. As part of my job, I had to call people on their discrimination against women, or against the Native Americans, or whoever it was. That did not endear me to people. What I represented was anathema to a lot of folks.

## Reaping What You Sow...

If what we're reaping right now is any indication, we must have done an amazing sowing job in the past year or two! So much so that the alternate title for this article was "Scary Math" – and here's why:

As of today, 37 interviews have been conducted during 2017. The math tells us first that we're setting an astounding pace for interviewing, and second, if our interviewers continue to work at anything near that rate, we'll do more interviews in 2017 than in any other year. Those 37 interviews were done by 17 interviewers, with some doing three or more themselves. Sixteen of the women newly interviewed are in their 80s, and one woman was 92. They live all over: Florida, Iowa, California, Kansas, Indiana, New Mexico, Vermont, Minnesota and a group of women wintering in Arizona. It's been an exciting year already – we can hardly wait to see what the rest of the year will bring us.

2017  
80s<sup>37</sup>  
x 17<sup>+</sup>  
92

## Whose Story Is It?

A question we seem to get every so often is about ownership of a woman's story once she shares it with us. Here is the answer! Women granting us an interview do sign a contract with the OLOHP allowing us to use their story as described. Beyond that, their story is their own, to do with what they wish! What we do ask is that if the transcript, or parts of it, are shared for use with another project, or in another publication, that the woman cites the source as being from an interview done with the OLOHP. We'd hate for any woman to be hesitant in sharing with us because she thought we were claiming exclusive rights.

it's your  
story!

## Our Motto: Never Stop Learning

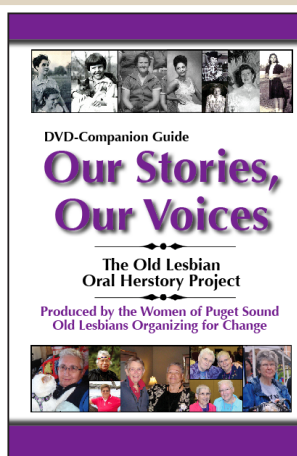
We've not so much adopted the motto *Never Stop Learning* as we've accepted it as unavoidable. If we're going to be constantly challenged to learn something new – as we have been – then why not embrace it!

You'd think, after all the interviews we've conducted and processed, we'd have done it all. But sometimes it's a new situation like Gloria mentioned in her article. She's is housebound, and the woman she'll be interviewing next is also housebound. Great if you lived in the same house, but alas, that's not the case. Gloria will do the interview via the phone, which we've done before. While others recordings done this way were okay, the sound quality of the person not in the room was less than ideal. We checked out a few apps designed for recording directly on a smart phone, but decided to stay a bit more low tech.

So we've added a small speaker (connected via earphone jack on the phone or bluetooth) to the mix. The speaker airs the voice coming in over the phone making it sound as if she is in the room. Now the sound levels of the two voices can be matched in volume, they are clearer, and we avoid that hollow, distant quality heard when your ear to the phone itself, or even when using the phone's own built-in speaker.



Doing our interviews over the phone isn't ideal, but in this case, it sure beats the alternative. We didn't want to miss this story, and we wanted to do what we could to keep Gloria interviewing for us!



## 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 w. 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](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.

A special thanks to OLOC, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, [www.oloc.org](http://www.oloc.org), for their ongoing support.