

The OLOHP Insider

#47, June 2021

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

Arden's Musings

Hello, good friends. First I want to let you all know I'm doing all right. I know it's been a long, long time since the last issue of the *Insider*. Life continues to feel strange for me here in Houston. COVID has made for a unique time in my life.

I'm sure most of you also heard on the news about the mess Texas got itself into during the cold spell that took out the power to millions of people in February. I've been living in a comfortable and convenient senior high rise for several years now. I miss having a home, but after watching what other homeowners had to go through (days without electricity and heat, frozen pipes, ruined landscapes and more), I have to say I'm even more glad that I'm here in the high rise. Even now, several months later, I have friends who are still trying to fix the damages, waiting on long lists for plumbers and home repair folks to get to them. The staff where I now live were wonderful thru it all. They used generators to keep the power going on the lowest floors and for the elevators. I could go down for food when I needed, to warm up if I was cold, to charge my cell phone and iPad. When all was said and done, I'm

very grateful. I don't think I'll ever get over how many messes Texas manages to get into because of its bizarre politics! The staff has been great through this whole pandemic.

I heard from several of you recently when an article about me appeared in a Houston LGBTQ publication, *OutSmart*. It was fun to be interviewed, and the article got most everything right, but there were a few errors that need clarification. Despite what was printed, I started this Project in 1998 (not 1988) which makes it almost 23 years old (not 33 as they wrote). The article also noted that all our interviews were archived at Smith College and that we were duplicating the collection at Texas A&M. Many of our interviews are at Smith, but not all, and some will be going to Texas A&M, but they are not there yet. The article also listed Goodreads for where to buy our books –that may be true, but your best bet is to order them through our website where you can get a deal on buying both at once. In the article's authors defense, he was pushed by a tight deadline, and other than the goofs, it shared an accurate peek at what the OLOHP is all about. Out of it, I'm claiming the right to use the photo over there on the left!

We continue to work away on various aspects of the OLOHP these days, doing a bit of interviewing via Zoom and working with stories that are in process, being transcribed and such. You'd think by now, having worked with over 750 women, that the stories would become repetitive and lose their charm, but that isn't the case. It's affirming when we do hear similar stories, but each one is unique and fascinating.

I hope many of you have already gotten your COVID vaccines, and if not, you'll get them soon. As soon as MD Anderson deemed it safe to vaccinate those of us who have had chemo, they got us all taken care of. That makes me feel better about starting to go out and about and get back to my old life. Please take care of yourself, and those around you. Be well.

Arden



Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older
OLOHP • PO Box 7382 • Houston, TX 77248 • www.olohp.org • info@olohp.org

Given that this issue of the *Insider* is unusual in that it's out of sync, having been almost six months since the previous issue, we've also had to make another change to our usual way of doing things. Sadly, since the previous issue, we've learned of the passing of eleven women who shared their stories with us. Instead of using the available space for other articles, the balance of this issue will focus on sharing a bit about each of the women. For continuity between them all, we're opting to use passages from their transcripts that tell of their first attraction to other women.

Tre Ford, Born August 1928

Interviewed by Arden in 2001 (lived in California)

When did I first have feelings of love for another woman? Probably when I was six years old. I fell in love with the girl next door. Boy, I'll tell you, this was it. I never was interested in boys like other girls were interested in boys. I was always in love with some girl in my class. Nobody knew this but me. I was the only one that felt like that in the whole world; therefore, I didn't tell anybody until the summer I graduated from high school. But then I decided I had to get married, because I had to have a baby. My brother was in the Marines and he had this Marine buddy that I started going out with. I told Eddie that I thought we should get married because I wanted to have a baby. So we rushed off to Yuma, Arizona and got married. I left him. (Laughing). I didn't get pregnant, but I thought, "Boy, this is no good, this is not working" That didn't last long, two and a half months.



Jeanne Walton, Born December 1929

Interviewed by Arden in 2002 (lived in West Virginia)



I remember in kindergarten thinking all the little white girls with long, silky hair were pretty. I remember wishing that I looked like them. Generally speaking in all my "relations" with girls, and women I did not think in terms of loving them, but rather of being like them. I had my first crush when I was in junior high school on a young woman who had just graduated from high school. She had a job and she and her sister had refurnished their bedroom. I was impressed by that. They had maple furniture from Sears, matching bedspreads and drapes, a coordinated rug. I wanted to have a room like that when I grew up. This woman went to work in the afternoon. From my window I would watch until I saw her leave her house. Then I would run downstairs and walk with her to her job. I hung out with her all the time at her house and when she babysat for her nephew. My mother was concerned. She would ask me, "What is the nature of your relationship with that girl?" I had no idea what she meant. There was nothing sexual on either of our parts. I thought my friend had a wonderful life and I wanted a life like hers.

Ivy Bottini, Born August 1926

Interviewed by Arden in 2009 (lived in S. California)

After I graduated and I was 18, I was coming over to Peg's house, or her apartment, and I unlocked the door and walked upstairs. I said, "Where are you, Peg, I'm here?" I heard her voice say, "I'm in here." "Where?" She said, "I'm in the bedroom." I had never been in the bedroom...I had only been in the kitchen, the bathroom, and the living room, all those years. 'Cause she lived in the same place. So I walked into the bedroom, and she was standing on the other side of the bed. She had a robe on. Nice, flowered, probably a linen robe. I could see it was unbuttoned. I said, "What are you doing?" And she... she opened the robe and said, "Sun bathing." She was totally nude! I said, "Oh, okay," and turned around and walked out. I kicked myself for leaving for years. I mean, every day, it was like, "Why did I walk out?!"



They were all incredible women, well-loved, and we'll miss them.

Harriet 'Rikki' Lewis, Born August 1937

Interviewed in 2012 by Chris Pattee (lived in Florida)

When I moved into my first apartment, it was brand new. I was the second tenant to move in. More people were moving in and one night I got a phone call from a woman. You know how people talk when they're talking to somebody, a flirting voice? I don't remember exactly what she said, but she wanted to be with me, go on a date or something. She said, "Well, why aren't you going out tonight?" I was saying no. She said, "If you never tried it, how do you know?" "No. I'm just not interested." And that was it. I didn't know who... I was in my 20s, probably my late 20s at that point. I was always flattered if somebody was interested in me! But I just wasn't interested, that's all. It was years later that I got together with a woman. Even then, I didn't think of myself as a lesbian. I was just "having the experience." I went back to dating men. Later, I went asexual. I used to think that when women really wanted to be friendly with me, "Maybe they're lesbians, otherwise why would they be interested in me?" This was my self esteem... no self esteem! I had no idea I was good looking, until recently, when I looked at the pictures of me when I was younger and I said, "My god. I was gorgeous!" (chuckling)



Mary 'Nickie' Valdez, Born Septemer 1940

Interviewed by Arden in 2017 (lived in Texas)



I first came out in high school. There were friends that I had that I knew were lesbians. None of us were open. It was all very closeted. The closest I came to having a good relationship with a friend was a gay guy who would act like he was going to date me and come and pick me up at my house. Then we would go out together and do our own thing. I think there was a lot of that in our generation. He was a great dancer, and I liked going out with him. We had fun. And, I was safe. He wasn't a young man who was going to give me any trouble of any kind. We had a lot of fun, but then, when I came out, it was out and open. No more pretense.

I came out openly at 21. I had just finished school at 20. I was in the convent for two and a half years. I did postulancy and novitiate. Then, when I found out I couldn't stay, I left and came back to school. You asked if I left the convent because I was in touch with who I was. It wasn't. When I joined the convent, they wanted to know if my parents had been married by the church. I wasn't from a Catholic marriage. I was extremely hurt, disappointed.

Joan Drury, Born February 1945

Interviewed by Mary Kurth in 2019 (lived in Minnesota)

When I got divorced, I went back to school and discovered Women's Studies, which changed my life. A lot of lesbians! I had said for years to my friends, "It would be much easier if I were a lesbian, because I'm never going to find a man who gets it." I never thought I was. I know a lot of women who have been married and had kids and all of that and kind of knew always. I never did. I had very intense friendships always with girls when I was growing up. I can tell you my best friends from five years old on, very intense friendships, but I never remember feeling any sexual components in them. It just never occurred to me.

When I walked into my first Women's Studies class, I just went, "Oh, my \$##@^& God. I have found my home!" It was like everything that had been going on in my head. I read *The Feminine Mystique* in 1965 two years after I got married. I had to put it outside of my house, because I didn't know what to do with it. Once I read that book, I knew it was wrong for me to be in this marriage.





Sylvia O'Neill, Born October 1928
Interviewed by Elsa Green in 2018 (lived in Wisconsin)

In college, I was simultaneously in love and dating this guy, Gerry, and with a girl down the hall. We weren't doing much about it – actually, we kept that up pretty much through the whole four years. It was just a really affectionate relationship. If either of us had recognized ourselves as gay, it would have gone somewhere further, but it didn't. Meanwhile, she is dating, and I am dating. We both get engaged, and we both end up marrying. I didn't have anything to complain about at the time. But it wasn't more than, maybe a couple years, before I sort of fell for another woman, a graduate student. If I had known about myself what I know now, I don't know if I would have shied away from that. But I have figured out I am a rescuer. As soon as I hear a sad story, I am likely to be a sucker. I am likely to be a pushover. I get emotionally attached, and she had a very sad story. She had been a refugee and lost everything, and she cried. Oy!

They were all incredible women, well-loved, and we'll miss them.

Diane Ross, Born May 1937
Interviewed by Sherry Fulton in 2017 (lived in California)

When I was in college. I went to the library and started reading about homosexuality. I was scared to death as I was reading it, but just wanting to know what it was all about. Then I stopped reading it... closed the book... put it away... and didn't go back to that for a long time, a couple of years. Why? Well, because I had different feelings than I thought my friends did. I am not sure, but somebody, at some time, must have made some comments to me or something because in college, I really, really wanted to know more about it. Then, it scared the bejeezus out of me when I started reading about it. Oh, my God! I never said anything to anybody, and this is the first time I ever mentioned the fact that I did that when I was in college.

You go to a cubicle all by yourself, so nobody sees what you are reading. It was enough to scare you to death. It did scare me. I think it really did. Then I shoved that back. "That's really not me. It can't be. It can't possibly be."

Now I'm in my mid-30s. I had no interest in women at all, or men. That part of my life was closed. A fellow teacher was getting a divorce and he had a white Firebird, with red racing stripes and a red interior. It was a gorgeous car. He had to sell it. I didn't have \$5000, and that's what he needed. I graduated with my PhD with no debt and no savings. I was right down to nothing. I'd met with a banker, a woman. I did all the paperwork and waited for whatever is supposed to happen when you are taking out a loan, and she said, "Would you like to go next door and have a drink?" "Oh, okay." We spent the rest of the afternoon in the bar. I don't think she ever went back to work, and I certainly didn't go back to school. I don't drink, but I think I had a beer or something. Anyway, we talked a lot that afternoon. That's how it all started. Then, we started seeing each other, and there it goes. I fell madly, madly in love with her, absolutely madly in love with her.



Marie Pearce, Born March 1928
Interviewed by Arden in 2006 (lived in Texas)

When I went into nurse's training in Texas, I was barely 18. When I was there..... I knew I was always gay but I didn't know... I had never been with anyone and I met this, one of the nurses, and we were-involved-even after I married. I knew I was different. I knew I liked women but I did not-I thought that I had to get married because that's what people are supposed to do. I thought I had to marry. Biggest mistake I ever made. I knew I was always gay but I didn't know-I had never been with anyone and I met this, one of the nurses, and we were-involved-even after I married.

They were all incredible women, well-loved, and we'll miss them.

Ffiona Morgan, Born November 1941
Interviewed by Deirdre Knowles (lived in Oregon)



I was married. She was married. I was sitting there with her, and she put her hand on my arm and left it there. It was like electricity for me, and I was so totally confused about what was happening, but I remember the song that was playing. I remember being there with her. Then she started doing that more, and more. Later, I go over there. I knock on the door, and nobody answers. I yelled, I knocked, and nobody answers. Then I noticed there's someone inside. It was her, but she wouldn't answer the door. I was totally confused, and I went home and started calling her. She wouldn't answer. I go back to her house. She wouldn't answer. This went on for like a week and a half until finally, she answered the door. She told me, "I can't see you anymore." Her husband had banned her from seeing me because he... either she told him something, or the kids told him something. He saw what was happening between us. He wanted to make sure we broke it up. I remember I cried, and cried, and cried. My husband would say, "Why are you crying. She's just a woman." He knew I was crying over her, because he had asked me, and I told him. "I can't see Jackie anymore." It was the end of my world. The friendship was a year-and-a-half, or two years. We had been seeing each other more, and more, and more. That's the first inkling that I had, and she was the one that made all the moves. I was, like, frozen... I didn't know what to do.

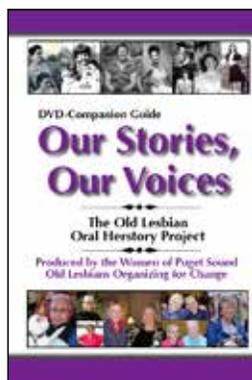
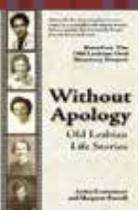
Nan McTeer, born October 1936
Interviewed by Arden in 2011 (lived in Texas)



I ran with little boys and rough and tumble. My mother wanted a very feminine little girl, and tried her best to dress me in lace and silks and taffetas. She put me in ballet school and I was so embarrassed that I would lie down on the cement porch, hiding behind the banister. I didn't want anybody to see me in that costume. About the same time, I had crushes on girls. There was a little boy two or three doors down. He had an older sister and she kissed him on the forehead and left a big imprint on his forehead. I had a cousin visiting me at the time, a grown woman, and I made her kiss me on the forehead so I could have a big lip print on my forehead, too! So, very early on I had crushes on girls. I didn't think anything about it at that time.

When I was in elementary school, a girlfriend got a copy of *Confidential* magazine. It had an article in it about homosexuality. That was the first time I'd ever heard the word 'homosexual.' I thought, "Well, that's me!" But the article showed two women dressed up in men's clothes. I thought, "Well, that's not me! Nor do I want to be with someone dressed up like a man. I wouldn't mind dressing like a man myself but I don't want to be with anyone that way." I don't remember..., I don't think the article used the word 'lesbian.' I don't think I knew the word lesbian.

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.

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