

The OLOHP Insider

May 2013

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

Issue 18



As we enter Pride season, a chant often used in marches: *Two, four, six, eight. How do you know your Grandma's straight?*

In the last two issues of the *OLOHP Insider*, we've briefly mentioned our upcoming conference – now we're going to give you the full court press!

We must have thought we didn't have enough to do, because we've taken on hosting a symposium, *Celebrating Our Lesbian Legacies*, put on solely by us, and about us, but open for everyone to attend. The event will take place in Houston, Texas, on October 10-13.

Our first task was to decide why we wanted to do this, and what it was we hoped to accomplish. That was easy: we want to recognize and honor the lives, contributions and achievements of the old lesbians of this era and add further to the documented history that the OLOHP has been gathering.

Now we're busy with the myriad of details that come with any conference. The event opens Thursday evening with a welcome and winds up with a light dinner Sunday evening. The time in between will be filled with panels, presentations, and group discussions. Our keynote speaker will be noted author and lesbian historian Lillian Faderman. Friday evening will be a dance, and Saturday evening, a banquet and concert featuring singer, songwriter and author Jamie Anderson.

When we talked about the focus of the event, we realized that this will be a perfect opportunity to explore a few unique, maybe even iconic, aspects

Celebrating Our Lesbian Legacies: An Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Symposium

of lesbian culture that emerged in the late 1900s. To that end, there will be panels focused on:

- Women's music: how the genre emerged, the role it played, and the outgrowth of women's music concerts and music festivals
- Lesbian literature: including lesbian publishing houses and women's/lesbian bookstores
- Lesbian living: separate land and housing
- Lesbians and politics: the role of lesbians in the Women's and LGBT Movements
- Birds of a Feather: forming social communities

The symposium will offer opportunities for lesbians to share various aspects of their personal stories through small discussion groups focused on narrow aspects of our lives, such as coming out to a husband or children, lesbians in the military, growing up in the Catholic tradition, dealing with the loss of a partner in a less than accepting world, and more.

The event is open to everyone. Many of those attending will be lesbians in their 50s, 60s, 70s, and older, but the conference will also draw younger lesbians, as well as a few gay men, and even some straight folks. It's going to be a great conference and we'd love to have you there.

We encourage you to visit www.olohp.org and click on "Celebrating Lesbian Legacies" for more info, and details on registering either online, or via the mail. And, please, speak up if you have questions!

Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older

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Arden's Musings

Although writing is not my forte, it is good to drop a line to you again.

This has been a very different year for us here in Houston. Usually, by this time of year, we have made at least two trips for interviews, and are getting ready for our annual summer trip. Instead, we have been out once, in January, to Arizona. Our most cherished friend, Vera Martin, died late last year, so we drove to Apache Junction for her January memorial service. Vera's great-granddaughter guided the well attended memorial service in her park.

What we had expected to be a sad experience and trip turned out to be a most uplifting one for both Charlotte and I. Over the past twenty years we have made many trips to AJ, and made many friends. Some are gone now, and several are frail.

We helped celebrate Ellie Schaffer's 96th birthday with lunch. She still works two days a week as a

drug and alcohol abuse counselor! We had worried about Dee Austin's severe health challenges, but when we stopped by, she greeted us at the front door! Dee is now 77. Irene Weiss, who is now 87, had long ago lost her partner, and struggled through several serious health issues. But she too greeted us, smiling, with her new partner at her side. I left for home with achy cheek muscles from grinning. What's to not love about these wonderful old women?

Soon we will leave for our summer odyssey to the National Women's Music Festival in Madison, then on to Washington – more music and work. While in the area, I'll fly to Oregon again for several interviews.

Since the January trip our focus has been essentially on the upcoming conference. Lots of busy work to do for the Host group. If our ideas materialize, you will learn a lot about the wonderful women who have shared their life stories with us over the years. This conference is about YOU, and for YOU. We hope to see many of you here in October.

Arden, 1931

Any Blue- or Pink-Collars Out There?

We've had an interesting inquiry from a historian working on a book project about the history of LGBT people in the workplace, from the mid 1940s forward. She contacted us because she was finding it difficult to locate lesbians, who are now 70 or older, who worked in blue- or pink-collar, occupations. She asked if there were women whose stories are in our collection that fit her needs and that might be willing to talk with her.

We thought about all the stories we have, but found that while many of the women may have worked traditional blue- or pink-collar jobs at some point in their working lives, very few stayed in that category, often moving up into management positions or going back for further education. It's made for some interesting speculation as to why.

If you happen to have been a blue- or pink-collar worker and are in the age range she's looking for, or know someone who is, or have some ideas on how she might locate these women, please drop her an email. Her name is Margo Canaday, she works at Princeton, and you can contact her at: mcanaday@Princeton.EDU



**On Feb 18, 2013, at 10:03 AM,
BARBARA LOVE wrote:**

To whom it may concern: I can say with no reservations that the interview by Chris Pattee was the best ever done with me. It was very thorough and I was given a chance to correct anything. Plus the presentation of the finished product, complete with pictures relating to the text, was very professional and impressive. This group certainly has its act together and doing great work. I urge you and others to participate.



Passings

*Dorothy 'Dottie' Fowler
Born 1927
in Garden City, Illinois*

*Died 2013
in San Francisco, CA*

*Interviewed originally in 2003 and gave a
follow up interview in 2011.*



Excerpts from Mary Henry's Herstory

When Gretchen, my best friend from my childhood, and probably my first love, died, that made me stop and think a lot about how I had felt about her, and realize and recognize that I was starting to feel that way about Margaret. And I wondered what it was all about. I read all the Greek mythology when I was young so I knew about Lesbos and I knew what lesbians were. But that was a mental construct. I didn't know anybody. I didn't know the words. I remember when I was in high school, it was said that people who liked to tell dirty jokes were queer. That queer meant you were homosexual. That didn't compute.

I just felt that what I felt for Margaret was very special and it was different than all that.

Very early on, the summer after I met Margaret, my family, all of us, went to a counselor because of my oldest daughter's difficulties. We all interviewed – the whole family. First, my husband and I, and the two girls, then all of us together. The counselor talked about things and then he says, "Now I need to talk to all of you separately." In the talk all together, it came up that Kim had a crush on Margaret, just like I had a crush on Margaret.

Margaret's age actually put her exactly halfway between us. It was an issue. I don't remember what was said in the group thing, something about Margaret, I didn't think it was anything very illustrative of anything other than that Kim thought a lot about her and that I had a lot to do with her. Then he took us off separately to talk to and when he came in to talk to me, he sat down and he got right up in my face and he says, "The first thing I need to know is... Are you a homosexual? Because if you are, I can't help you." I was stunned. That put me back in the closet for quite a while.

Even then I only had my toe out, trying to figure out where I was. That man! I had the satisfaction of knowing he got his license jerked a few years later. That was a good thing. That was the first time I'd had the word used in connection with me and that was not pleasant. But I'm sure many people have had a lot worse than that.

The next time that it really clicked was that we had this customer... he and his wife would both come in. We liked them really well and he was a counselor. I was having difficulty with relating to what was going on with my daughter. That would be another whole interview all together, so I won't get off in that. But I said I would like to have a session with him. Margaret went with me. I asked her to go and he said that would be fine. We'd been there maybe twice and told him how I was finding this all so difficult. He said to me, "In the best of all possible worlds, what would you like your life to be?" I stopped and I thought about that and I didn't have any words to put it in. All I could say to him was, "I would like to make my life with women."

That was the start of my truly understanding what that could mean. We went on from there and he was most helpful. I got my act together. It helped us so much.

Mary Henry

*born May 1939
interviewed at age 71*



Young bride, 1959



At Girl Scout Camp, 1977, the year Mary met Margaret



Age 72, 2011

Always Learning, Always Growing

Something New For Us

It really isn't surprising that even after 15+ years, and 300+ stories, we learn something new every time we do another interview. Each woman truly has a unique story to tell, and each tells it in her own way. But you would think that our part of what needs to be done to a herstory after the interview is complete would be pretty routine by now. Not so.

As we worked on Morgan Ahern's story, we were presented with a new, and interesting, twist. Morgan had provided us with tons of support documents and as we worked on getting the scanned documents and photos placed onto pages to go into the finalized herstory, Margaret would have a question, and she'd email Morgan to get a bit more information. "Tell me again about the set of postcards depicting famous people who were Roma. I have the images, but couldn't remember how they came to be." Or, "I'm wondering about the significance of the chickens in your Museum items we photographed in your apartment."

In response, Morgan not only provided the needed details so we would appropriately caption her photos, she gave us bits and pieces that added significantly to what she shared in her actual interview.

Then the challenge became what to do with those pieces. We didn't

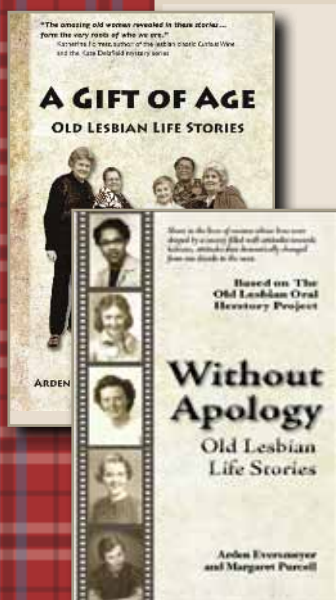
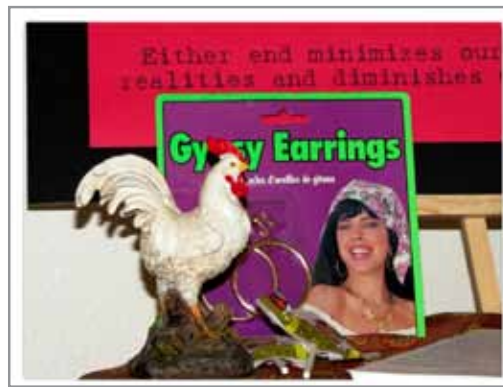
want to put words into her mouth, by inserting text into her interview. Then, in one of those "well, duh" moments, we realized there was nothing but our own habits limiting captions to bare facts, like, "In Morgan's apartment, photo taken 2012." Instead, the expanded caption now reads:



When asked about the photos and ceramic chickens in the Romani (Gypsy) museum items in her apartment, Morgan replied:

"There's a stereotype of Gypsies stealing chickens. When we set up the museum in the little trailer, we also put up a little fence and had two chicken statues in the yard. We made a sign that said PLEASE DON'T STEAL THE CHICKENS. The next morning when I came to open up, there was another chicken in the little yard. Periodically, another would arrive, including a cute little stuffed chicken. It was a great, and amusing, show of support from the community."

It was amazing how much those expanded captions added to the finished herstory. So much so, that we're trying to work out a way we can do it more often.



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.