

The OLOHP Insider

#36... 3rd Issue for 2017

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

Musings: Sharing Some Good News, and Not-So-Good News

This past few weeks have been a challenge, to put it mildly. We'd like to use some space in this very late issue of *The Insider* to bring you all in on what's been going on.

The good news — in fact the best news — is that everyone is okay. Arden has reached out to as many of the women involved in the Project who live in Florida and Texas as she she can reach and it seems most of made it thru the hurricanes intact. Some, like those at Sugarloaf Women's Land, have sustained a lot of property damage, but the women are okay.

Let's back up to the last week of August. If you know Arden at all, you already know she a listener, and she knows when to take things seriously. Having lived in Houston for decades, she learned long ago when to heed the warnings of potential flooding. That sense of caution was strenghtened when, in 2001, she and Charlotte woke one morning to find several feet of muddy water occupying their home. Tropical storm Allison had acted up, hitting the Houston area with little warning. It took them years to recover. This time, as Hurricane Harvey approached, they had lots of warning and Arden and Charlotte did what they could to protect things in their house before leaving to stay outside the city. Skip ahead a few very tense days and we come to the not-so-good news: after having gotten as close as their door-step and receding several times, the flood water did finally get into their home.

Back to good news: Over the years, Arden and Charlotte "paid it forward," building an amazing network of friends in the LGBTQ community. Before they even made it back into town, friends were checking on their home and accessing the damage. And they didn't stop there. For days on end, friends came to tear out carpets, drag out pieces of

soggy upholstered furniture, open up walls, remove insulation, empty out low drawers and cabinets, do what they could to rescue appliances, clean up the muck, remove the debris from the yard, repeatedly apply bleach everything to ward off the inevitable toxic molds, and more.

Another piece of good news in all this is that Arden and Charlotte had already taken some steps toward down-sizing and had investigated options on where they might want to move. Caring for a two-story, nine-room house sitting on a 1/2 acre had become more than they could manage comfortably. So they already had their names on a list to get into a senior living community, The Forum, not far from where they live. None-the-less, this wasn't the way they had planned to make such a major change in their lives.

Thousands of people are homeless in Houston and thousands of homes will need to be repaired or rebuilt. It would have been months, if not years, for Arden & Charlotte to get the repairs needed to make their home livable and safe again. So, for two months, they essentially camped upstairs. Emotionally devastated, they began the difficult process of sorting everything they own, deciding what to move with them, what would have to go into storage, what could be donated, and what had to be thrown away. Initially, they thought they'd have to move into temporary housing for a couple of months, then move again once their space was ready. But, when the folks at The Forum heard this, they fast-tracked the work on their unit so that Arden and Charlotte would only have to move once, which is what they are doing right now.

"We are tired and occasionally blue, but we are safe and blessed with a support system of wonderful women. We are both more-than-ready for some quiet time in a clean environment. And we both thank all of you for caring. Arden and Charlotte



Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians 70 and Older

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How Was the OLOHP Affected?

We've worried about the future of the Project quite a bit over the years and taken several steps to protect it the best we can.

In terms of the here and now, from Arden's end of things, the Project is basically on hold temporarily – it will take a while to get a working office space back up and running. That said, we are all still working, just a bit slower than usual. Most everything is running through Margaret for now. And as strange as it feels to say, we're actually grateful this disruption happened now – it's not tax time, and we didn't have to cancel any presentations or trips.

The primary office for the Project has always been in Arden's home in Houston, with a few things in a storage unit. Having lived thru having an office full of soggy paperwork and equipment once before, her home office was upstairs and that storage unit was on an upper level of a climate controlled facility. The secondary office is at Margaret's home in University Place, Washington. A significant portion of the Project has also been archived at Smith College.

But those are the physical parts of the Project. If anything would happen (like a fire), parts of the Project would unfortunately be lost, but we think that would be limited to some current records and paperwork. We long ago had to get over our discomfort with things we don't truly understand and can't see or stuff into a file cabinet. First we made sure as much as possible was digitized. And in case a computer crashed, we backed files up on CDs/DVDs, and then on external hard drives. But even those are at risk in a calamity, so we now also have 90% of our materials backed up with Dropbox, in the



proverbial "cloud." Arden and Margaret can both access that account and all its files. We've also shared the access info with other OLOHP Board members. We won't pretend it wouldn't be a huge challenge for someone who didn't create and organize the files to use them, but if needed, it could be done. Herstories, or projects like indexing, that are currently in the works, and the most recent bookkeeping records, aren't backed up, but otherwise we think we've done what can be done.



A Loss for the Project

In the photo above, that's Debbie Hunt on the right. Debbie died this summer. She wasn't an interviewer, and she hadn't been interviewed. Yet she was an important part of the OLOHP. Debbie was the lawyer who helped us take the necessary legal steps to shape a Project of this nature from its very beginning. She and her partner Connie Moore met while in law school and they both devoted much of their time to working, pro bono, with non-profit organizations in the LGBT community in the Houston area. Debbie died in July after a very short journey with ovarian cancer. Her wife, Connie, died of the same cancer just two years ago. Debbie was only 56 years old. The loss of these two young women has left a very large hole in the Houston community as well as in our hearts. Their legacy will live on forever.

Arden

You can access an article about Debbie at:
<http://tinyurl.com/y94du6c5>

No Moss Under These Feet

Presentations can be a lot of work, but they are fun, too. Kathy Prezbindowski, Ruth Benton, (both interviewers-interviewees) and Arden recently gave two presentations focusing on coming out at Texas A&M University in College Station. Up in the Puget Sound area, Aganita Varkentine (interviewer-interviewee-transcriber), took the lead on two more presentations, one to Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA) and the other to the NW LGBT Senior Care Providers Network. And they're planning more. We sure do love sharing with others!



What a Way To Show Your Support!

(by Edie Daly, an avid OLOHP cheerleader!)

“Our Lives are our story, and our story is our life. Story is the narrative thread of our experience, not what really happens, but what we make out of what happens. What we remember, what we tell each other, and what we choose to forget or leave out.”

This is the beginning of what I call my “Old Lesbian Memory Quilt” story. I made a twelve patch quilt. Each square a part of my story. I used the quilt and the stories as a way to celebrate my 80th birthday in January. Nine Old Lesbians each read a part of the story. Sixty of my friends attended and in lieu of a gift, I asked everyone to contribute to OLOHP. I was excited that we raised \$1189.00 for the project.

My wife, Jackie Mirkin, and I were interviewed by Arden in 2004. Our stories are in Margaret and Arden’s book, *Without Apology*. I have been an interviewer for the Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project for several years. We never charge a narrator when we interview her. It costs approximately \$700 to bring an interview from the initial contact to the finished transcript which is comb bound as the Herstory. The oral herstories are housed at Smith College in Northampton, MA. Jackie and I spend the summers in Northampton and last summer we did an open reading of my Quilt Story. We raised \$200 for the project at that event.

There are many ways to support the project. Having a house party and reading from one of the books, or showing the DVD *Our Stories, Our Voices* are ways to involve local women and are interesting ways to share stories of Old Lesbian’s lives. Do you have a local senior center or library? Margaret is always willing to work with you on what you might need to make something happen.

What are some of the creative ways you can use to raise the needed funds to keep the Project going?



Speaking of Fundraising...

In our last issue of *The Insider*, we let you know we were in need and asked you to help. You didn't let us down! Two women had each offered to match up to \$5000 that we could raise thru individual donations, and we met that goal. Like magic, that turned \$5000 into \$15,000, an amount that will help us get caught up on processing stories that are already in and give us a headstart on 2018. Thank you all! We truly couldn't continue with this work without donors and without volunteers. Whether you donated a few dollars, or \$5000, you are all amazing!!!



We've Added a New Page to our Website and Want Your Input!

Not surprisingly, the women who have shared their stories with the OLOHP are a fascinating bunch. So much so that we decided to devote a page on our website to highlight some of the many endeavors in which they are currently involved. Not only do we encourage you to go check out the new page we've added (and will expand) at www.olohp.org, we encourage you to provide us with more items to add. You'll find it under the header **More: What OLOHP Women Are Up To**.

Examples of what you'll find there right now are:

- Laura Bock's book *Red Diaper Daughter*
- Gaye Adegbalola's music
- Kathy Prezbindowski's Coming Out Women group
- JS&C&M&M, producing women's music house concerts

We'd love to add information about one of your endeavors or passions! Reach out to Margaret.OLOHP@gmail.com.

*Oral Herstory of
Carol Herbert*



Born: November 11, 1934
Resides: Brooksville, Florida
Interviewed in April 2013
Interviewer: Betsy Tabac
Transcriber: Emily Levy

*Oral Herstory of
Teresa Lawrence*



Born: September 16, 1929
Resides: Wallingford, Connecticut
Interviewed in October 2014
Interviewer: Christine Patten
Transcriber: Sandra C Warren
Died: April 2016

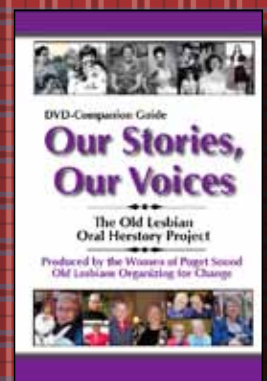
Oral History
Of
Sandy Cosgrave



Born: November 24, 1941 Resides: Gainesville, Florida
Interviewed: January 3, 2008
Interviewer: Adria Economyer Transcriber: Maryn Dahl

I was amazed to see how much work was put into my Herstory book. I didn't imagine that so much of my documentation would be used. The layout and organization was really outstanding. I never thought that I was saving all the documents and recordings for anything more than to be used as teaching material for other gay people who wanted to expand our community and our rights. My congratulations to you all for the amazing work you do. I also want to thank and commend Dana Rosenberg for her patience during the long interview process. As you can tell by the amount of material that is in the books, she helped me revisit a great many memories. Thank you so much for your good work.

Cathy M. Hemler, Tucson



We have learned that these four women who shared their stories with the OLOHP have died. They were loved, and we'll miss them.

I think one of the things people seem to be fascinated about is that I'm so old, and I'm gay!



*Ellie Schaffer
1917 to 2016
Interviewed: 2002
by Arden*

We'd like to share the above quote from Ellie as well as two brief stories about her.

Several years ago, Arden was doing some more work in Arizona. While there, she arranged a luncheon with many of the women in that area who had shared their stories. When Arden reached out to invite Ellie to join them, she was told to hold on a minute – Ellie had to check her calendar. "Sorry, Arden. Can't make it that day. I have to work. Maybe next time you're in Arizona." Here Ellie was, in her mid 90s, still working as a drug and alcohol counselor!

For a decade, Ellie remained the oldest living participant in the Project. Ruth Silver, another woman in the Project, used to swear she was going to live long enough to steal that distinction from her! Unfortunately Ruth died at age 96. Ellie died last fall at age 99.



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

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