

The OLOHP Insider

October 2010

The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project

Issue 6



Musings from Arden

There have been quite a few comments coming back to me about the map in Issue #5 of the Insider. Margaret was truly inspired to create and include the map in the newsletter. The comments have addressed the length of the project (it's 13 years now), the statistics included with the map, and the amount of travel that has occurred. So I took the time to really study the map. Some conclusions I have arrived at are:

1. The Project is far from done. There are too many wonderful old lesbians with valuable life stories yet to be recorded.
2. I will be 80 years old this next April, so I need to be more mindful of maintaining my own good health and energy.
3. To take care of myself, I need to reduce the number of trips to three or four yearly, which will give me more time to complete work at home.
4. I would like to train more old lesbians to be interviewers for the OLOHP, doing work in their own geographic area. Many women have

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expressed an interest and taken the training, but for various reasons, they are no longer interviewing. There are several women actively working to collect stories, but we need more.

5. We are "International" with stories in Canada and Australia, and an interviewer in Australia. But I would really like to develop contacts for more stories in Canada.

Charlotte and I love the travel. The mode of travel depends on the distance and possible housing at the destination. We are about to leave on our seventh and final trip for 2010 to Denver and the SAGE Conference.

What a ride this has been for me. The amazing women and wonderful friendships that have come my way. Margaret says I have to stay healthy ten more years to do this work. And I do feel a sense of urgency in finding the old lesbians born before 1930. They are fast disappearing. I interviewed one this year who is 92, so I keep looking.

So the work and the travel continues.

Arden, born 1931

Gathering the Unique Life Stories of Lesbians Born in the Early 1900s

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A Future Home is Found at Smith College

We have some good news about the OLOHP that some of you have already heard, but others have not. After lots of research, discussion and consideration, the Project has entered into an agreement with Smith College in Northampton, MA. They will become the permanent home for the archives of the Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project. We will begin transferring completed herstories, as well as many of the other files and records of the Project, later this fall. They will become a part of the Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History Manuscripts and part of a permanent record of the contributions and experiences of Old Lesbians born early in the 1900s.

We are very pleased and honored. It is gratifying to know that Smith College deems the information in the OLOHP a valuable asset. Smith's interest and willingness to house, protect and shepherd the valuable information in the OLOHP will insure its future.

Smith College is one of the top sources for research in women's history in the country with an excellent international reputation. We encourage you to visit their website www.smith.edu/libraries/libs/ssc/ Their materials are grouped into four categories: Collections (such as the papers of Margaret Sanger, Jane Addams and Gloria Steinem), Organizations (such as the YWCA and Planned Parenthood), Subjects (such as theatre, sports, and slavery) and Oral Histories. The OLOHP materials will add something unique to their holdings: stories of the lives and experiences of lesbians born early in the 1900s told from the unique viewpoint of women who have lived seven, eight, or even nine decades.

One of the final steps before making the decision about where to house the OLOHP to insure its future was our visit to Smith College. As a result of the visit and correspondence, we learned about some steps we can take prior to sending anything to Smith that will expedite making the Project's papers available for research. We have agreed to do some of the preliminary work, creating finding aides and organizing the materials. This will take some time, but we anticipate sending the first shipment of materials to Smith by year's end.



Visiting the Sophia Smith Collection: Standing, from left; Arden, Margaret, and Kelly Anderson, Smith College history lecturer and oral historian. Seated; Sherrill Redmond, Director of the Sophia Smith Collection.

These women have recently died, leaving behind friends, families and their Herstories. They will be missed.

Jess McVey was born in February 1918. She was interviewed in San Francisco, CA, in 2003.



Joanne McGibbon was born in June 1942. Interviewed in St. Paul, MN, in 2010, shortly before her death.



Excerpts from a few of the Herstories



1952

***Gloria Stancich**
Born June 1935*

*From her Interview
in September 2006*



1995

G: I had been a closet member of the National Organization for Women for years and one night in 1980, in my usual drunken stupor, I was sitting at my kitchen table underneath the phone, which is still on the wall there, waiting for my married lover to call me, as I did most every night, getting drunker by the moment. The phone rang and somebody was calling me from NOW and asking me to do something for the organization that I said yes to. And the next morning I could not remember what it was that I had said yes to. All I knew was that it was NOW. I had not been a member of the local organization, because I didn't want to be active, but the national had given the names out of people that lived in the local areas to the local chapters and that's how they had my name. So I had to go to this meeting at the YWCA in Tacoma to find out what it was I had said yes to.

And it turned out I had said yes to running as a delegate to their national conference in San Antonio that year. And I thought to myself, "This is really strange, because I am not active. Why would they want me to be a delegate to go?" But they had the election while I was at that meeting and I won this election. And then they told me what I needed to know, they told me why they let me go was that you had to pay your own way.

I: What year was this?

G: This was 1980. Okay. So this was — we had two years to go on the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment at that point. I had that summer decided that I was probably going to commit suicide. So when I got this phone call and found out that I had this obligation to take care of in September I decided I had to do that first. So I went to see a counselor and talked to her a little bit and she said, "I don't do suicides," so I said, "Well, I've got this conference I've got to go to first, so we'll talk when I get back." I decided that I wouldn't drink while I was on this trip.

I was rooming with a woman who was an alcoholic and I went to the liquor store for her but the whole time I was in San Antonio I didn't touch a drop of liquor. And I was so amazed at what was going on at this national conference. Ellie Smeal was in her third time as the president of NOW. She could not, according to the rules, run again. And so she was stumping for a suspension of the rules so that she could run again as president to see us through this period of time, to get us through the Equal Rights Amendment time period for ratification. So there was this major battle that went on on the floor.

There was a group of lesbians that had flown down from Alaska on the plane that I was on that were already... I mean they already had me hyped about this whole thing. And then there were all of the Ellie Smeal followers. I mean, she is one charismatic woman. And so, we had all these factions. And I'm sitting there, my head's just swimming. I haven't the vaguest idea what to do or what to say. But I learned enough so that when I got on the plane to come home... and I did get drunk on the plane coming home, by the way, because I'd done my job... but when I got home and thought about that a bit I decided that maybe there was something else I could do with my life.

- I: Through all the many years of your marriage, were you involved with women also?
- G: Yeah. I thought it was a sickness, so when I'd get turned on to or excited about a woman, I pushed the feelings away. But it (the feeling) would not stay away. Between seven and nine, I think I was already sexual [aware], and after that my mother's friends would come around and they'd hug me and stuff and I'd be... you know, I'd feel good inside. And when the thing came up about the queer thing, I thought, "Oh! It's me, I'm sick, I got a problem. You know, I got to stop this." So I fought it off, fought it off, and it kept coming. But I didn't have a relationship until I had been married 8 years. I married my husband when I was 18 and I never had a relationship with a woman or anybody else but him until I was 26 years old. My daughter was five or six, and I met her best friend's mother who happened to be bisexual. And I was reintroduced to the gay life, but she's the one who asked me if I ever loved women, you know. I mean, this was before touching. This was like I would always say, "Wow, look at her: she's so chic, ooh." And that's why she started saying to me, "Do you think you might be gay?" We used "gay" then, we didn't use "lesbian." I don't think "lesbian" was even out then. And also the consensus was that boys did it, but women didn't. We were exonerated or something. ...

The question was, did I during my marriage? Not until I met Barbara. And then it was just lightweight stuff. It was enough to titillate me into finding out where the gay bar was and meeting more and more women. And my husband would drop me off – I think he knew, he knew I was queer from the beginning. I think he knew from some stories I told him. 'Cause I trust people readily; I don't keep secrets and stuff. And I think he knew from that. See, people know you and you don't know yourself!

Ginny Morton *Born April 1933*

*From her Interview
in April 2003*



1947



1999



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 a copy of *A Gift of Age: Old Lesbian Life Stories*.**

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* 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 or going to our website and using the Donate Now button. You can also support the OLOHP by making a donation to OLOC, one of our sponsors, telling them it is on our behalf. Visit their website at www.oloc.org, or write PO Box 5853, Athens, OH 45701.*



How wonderful to read those amazing statistics! Thanks for including them along with your travelogue. And thank you for doing all you do. This is an important project, and I love reading every interview. Leela

Congrats on another interesting and well-presented newsletter! I especially like the idea of the updates. Beth