The OLOHP Insider

#62, December 2025 **The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Proj-**

Margaret Checking In

As I was reviewing the *Insider* that went out a short while ago, I began thinking about a statement I made. I'd said, "the goal has always been for *The Insider* to be a quarterly newsletter." That wasn't really quite true… or at least, not the whole truth. A more complete version of that statement would have said "Early on, I had no thoughts of doing a newsletter at all!" That idea didn't come up until after the Project had completed it's first book, *A Gift of Age*, an undertaking that had consumed both Arden and I for almost 18 months.

Once that book was done, we were spending some time together to make plans for what we'd focus on next. Having gone thru producing a book once, one of the items on my agenda was to talk about alternatives to doing that again. I had several alternative ideas. Top on Arden's list of ideas – starting a newsletter. And that wasn't instead of doing a second book, it was in addition to it! (If Arden were here to defend herself she might tell the story another way!) The end result was that we began *The OLOHP Insider*. Given this issue is the 62nd – Arden was right. It was a good idea.

As we prepped each issue, we'd brainstorm a bit to decide what relevant and interesting information to share. Like many projects, we'd start out each issue wondering what we could come up that something new, and by the time we were done, we'd have to set aside articles for a future issue.

Now we're taking a different approach – following a plan! You probably noticed that the last two pages of issue #61 followed a theme, that of coming out. If all goes well, we've decided on themes for each of the next dozen or so issues. Themes will range from military experiences, to working with counselors/therapists, to thinking you were the only ones in the world, and more. If you happen to have an idea for a theme, please share it with us. For this issue, we've chosen something that we hope will bring a smile to all of you, photos and thoughts about of marriages between women.

This past week I was doing some work on two Herstories from women living in Canada that we are wrapping up. While we do our best to catch any typos before printing out a transcript, in this case, we had to practice restraint. After correcting several, it dawned on me that they weren't typos, they were the alternate way of spelling some terms, American English vs British English. I'm glad the word processing program let me undo, undo, undo, because I'd "corrected" a series of words such as favourite, kilometres, neighbourhood, counselling and more. As I've said before, the Project continues to challenge me on a regular basis, which is a good.

One last thing… I feel a need to say outloud to myself and to others that while I'm still pecking away at my to-do list, my other commitments, my age (I'm now 74) and the impediments that come with age are noticeably slowing me down. Making lists and taking notes is no longer an option, they are a must! I fully expect to be able to keep doing what needs to be done, but not as quickly. I'm trying to cut myself some slack about it, but if you've waited longer for me to reply to an email, or do something else for you, just know I'll do my best to get to it as soon as I'm able.

Margaret

Pearl Berlin (1925) & Lennie Gerber (1936)

Monica Wehrle (1948) & Harriet Miller (1937)

Arden Eversmeyer (1931) & Charlotte Avery (1930)

Parts of Us That We Leave Behind

Even after 91 years of living, and 26 years of immersing herself in her brain-child (the OLOHP), we think Arden would be surprised to know just how much of herself she left behind. Arden wasn't shy, or self-deprecating – but she told us more than once that she was just doing her own thing. She'd already lived a 70 years when she began to think about somehow saving the stories of her friends. The idea bounced around in her head for a few years before Arden began what would become the OLOHP.

The most common response Arden got when she asked a women to get involved in the Project was, "I've never done anything worth telling." Yet Arden knew otherwise. Many of the earliest interviews were with women she had known for years and she knew that wasn't true. Arden forged ahead, working to show each woman that they did have a story worth sharing. It wasn't until Arden had been working her "little project" for a few years and had done dozens of interviews on the shelf that she wondered – she had created the Herstories for the benefit of the women she interviewed, but could they be of value beyond that?

When Hurricane Allison pushed several feet of water into her home where everything related to the Project resided, she began to think beyond her home office. She and Charlotte moved most of their valuables, including all the Project materials, upstairs for the interim and Arden began seriously wondering if she could find some place that would see the value in her work and be interested in preserving all the Herstories. She went from thinking what she was working on wasn't a big deal, to realizing it had a value beyond her sphere. So Arden formed a cadre – dozens of women who helped her transcribe, assemble Herstories, conduct interviews, index, write abstracts, work on the website and newsletter, and much more. 25+ years and 900+ Herstories later and there is no question but that Arden left a bit of herself behind with every one of those women and with generations to come.

In sharing her own Herstory with the Project, Arden had talked about Tre, a woman she had met almost 70 years earlier. Tre had, literally, pedaled from New York to Texas where she custom made sandals for students. As a customer, Arden spent a long afternoon talking with her. That discussion stayed with Arden, though she lost contact with Tre.

In her life as a teacher and school counselor, as well as partner for 33 years to Tommie before her death, she often thought about things she and Tre had talked about decades before. Shortly after Tommie died, Arden noticed an article in People about an all-woman construction crew and there was Tre. With a way to contact her, Arden wrote her a letter, part of which we'll share.

In the summer of 1949, a sophisticated lady arrived in Denton on her bicycle from New York City. Awesome! I had come out the previous year with a senior P.E. major. A lovely lady and still my friend. I no longer have any recollection of how I met you, Tre. I do remember a couple pair of shoes you made for me. But most important, I remember an all afternoon/evening bull session in your room that has profoundly affected my life. We discussed the lifestyle that had always been mine, but I had so recently discovered. As a result of that day there has never been one minute of regret, doubt or guilt for me.

In the many years I was in contact with young people I would often say it would be wonderful to know if I had made a positive impact on just one young life. The only way we ever know those things is if we are told. It is important that I say these words to you. My enduring relationship with Tommie was related to the peace of mind about myself and my lifestyle. That same peace has helped me in the months since Tommie died. I am changing and growing – almost like a new coming out. Maybe there will be another nice lady in my future – maybe not – I expect I'll be rather choosy. I have thought about you and that session so many times over the years. Then the article in People *gave me the tool I needed to say these words. I hope this reaches you. I am very grateful to you, Tresse Ford, and I hope your wisdom has touched others as it has me.*

Tre Ford

Having established contact with Tre more than 50 years after they met, Arden had the chance to get to know her again. In fact, in 2004, Arden interviewed her for the Project. Tre definitely left part of herself behind in Arden.

As we come up on the anniversary of Arden physically leaving us, one way we could all honor Arden this year would be to follow her lead and take time to share your thoughts with those who have been meaningful in your lives. We hope you do.

Words about Weddings, and Wedding Photos

Dee Austin (1926) marrying Jane (on the right)

She could go to work Saturday and Sunday, and then I would spend that week at her house… and do the opposite the next week. We did that for about a year. I was 60 at the time that this happened and we decided that this schedule was too much for two old ladies! Then we began not remembering where our clothes were, so we made the decision to live together.

Diana and Cat Schmidt, (1946 & 1952)

We couldn't hardly stand not being together at all, even for short periods of time. The whole world took on an entirely different aspect for me whenever I found her. I thought I was in love with my husband when I married him, and I guess I was, but it was nothing like it was with Cat. I mean she was my soul-mate, and there was no two ways about that. It's pretty amazing. I think we had the kind of love that not everybody gets in a lifetime. We were extremely fortunate. I think some people live all their lives looking for that and never get it. It was so different, so different.

Leonora McGall (1925) with Loie

Loie was my best best friend from the time we met when I was eleven and she was nine. We always stayed in touch and saw each other often, but forces in their lives kept us apart until we were 71 and 69. Something told me – I had a diamond and sapphire ring on my finger and I took it off and I gave it to her. I said, "Loie, I am never letting you out of my life again, as long as we both shall live." I put it on her finger and she said, "I'm overwhelmed, because I don't want you out of my life ever again." I want to tell you something. I've had honeymoons in my day, and this, the God's truth, was the best one of all. And it was the only one that counted, as far as I was concerned. From then on, it was just Loie and me. We started our lives together, we would end our lives together.

Emily McNally (1925) & Dana Finnegan (1932)

In 2000, we drove across to Vermont to Bennington and got a Civil Union. We wanted to support that activism. Then we went to New York in 2012 and got married at City Hall where my parents had been married. We loved NYC because we lived there so many years, so we decided that would be a great place to get married. My older son was our witness and then we went out with some friends afterwards and made that a nice little trip. Everybody was very positive on the plane flying to NY. It's amazing sometimes, the changes in society and in people. When we went to our local Mall and bought rings the sales people were very complimentary. "Oh, that's really nice that you're going to do that." So that was a very positive experience, getting married.

Jackie Mirkin (1931) & Edie Daly (1937)

Part of Edie's vows: "You are my guiding star, my inspiration as we walk besides each other supporting the other as we create this journey we are on every day."

Part of Jackie's vows: "I look forward to each second that we share. Thank you for helping me learn that the journey is the destination."

Jeanne Neath (1951) & Paula Mariedaughter (1945)

OLOHP Interviewers Carol (1962) & Sharon (1961) Seithel

Rebecca Dakota (1950) & Havens Levitt (1953)

Madge Sutter (1941) & Harriet Marks-Nelson (1933) (at two of their weddings!)

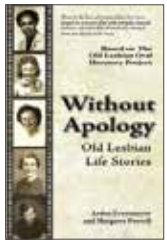
We got married here in California. We got married in New York. And we got married in Vermont. And we got married somewhere else. We been married four times!

Harriet had suggested, "We should renew our marriage commitment, our commitment to each other, every year." And we do. It just gets better.

Nelda Majors (1939) & Karen Bailey (1938) ←

Susan Nivert (1948) & Barbara Glenn (1955)

Martha Popp (1946) & Alix Olson, (1947)



A Gift of Age, *Without Apology*, and the DVD *Our Stories, Our Voices: The Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Projec*t (and the *Companion Guide to the DVD*) can be ordered at **www.olohp.org**

Thank You to the Kellett Foundation for your support of the OLOHP!

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