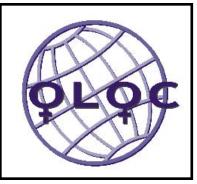
The Reporter

The quarterly publication of OLOC

Old Lesbians Organizing for Change

September 2006 VOLUME 16 ISSUE 3
OLOC is a nonprofit 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization.



Report on OLOC Gathering 2006, Leave No Old Lesbian Behind by Jan Griesinger, 63

OLOC held its first national gathering in the Southern United States, August 17–20, in Durham, North Carolina. Southern women responded in large numbers: 54 of a total of 125 Old Lesbians attended the event from 26 states and one woman from Norway. Women came from Hawaii, Maine, Washington, Florida, New York, and many states in between. An additional 30 women came to the banquet, the concert by Alix Dobkin, and the dance.

Scholarship funds to help women attend the Gathering came from 28 individual donors as well as the Gill Foundation, Silver Threads, National Center for Lesbian Rights, and the Astrea Foundation for Justice.

These generous donations made it possible for 21 Old Lesbians to attend the Gathering who could not otherwise have afforded doing so.

For the first time, OLOC held an intergenerational dialogue for local Lesbians the night before the Gathering began. The meeting room was packed to overflowing with 62 women from their 20s to their 70s. Ageism was the topic and discussion was lively.

Energy was high throughout the Gathering. Comments included: "We've never had anything like this before around here." "This is the most organized conference I've ever attended." "You were leaders without being authoritative." "This conference is really exciting." All are testimonies to the power of Old



Mandy Carter with Catherine Nicholson, founder and moving force behind Sinsister Wisdom

Lesbians joining together to sing, laugh, share stories, protest injustice, strategize for change, enjoy eating and dancing. Written evaluations are still being compiled.

We expect these evaluations to highlight those areas in which things were not done as well as they should have been and note improvements needed the next time around. Women in the session for the differently abled had many suggestions for making the Gathering even more accessible in the future.

Suzanne Pharr and Mandy Carter engaged in a stimlating face-to-face dialogue on "Race and Class: Bringing Us Together or Keeping Us Apart." This was followed by smaller discussion groups of women of color and white women

OLOC provides Old Lesbians with the chance to meet like-minded women in our common struggle to confront ageism, to share mutual interests, and to experience the joy and warmth of playing and working together.

meeting in different locations. OLOC acknowledges that it has a long way to go to be sure that women of color and poor women are truly welcome.

Workshops and discussions covered many topics of interest, including:

- 1. Lesbian Lives Aloud: Encouraging women to write their own experiences, and these were crafted into a presentation.
- 2. How to be Your Own Medical Advocate
- 3. Housing for Old Lesbians (article on page 10)
- 4. Dare I Fall in Love Again and Do I Want To?
- 5. Loss and Grief
- 6. Differently Abled in Organizational Settings
- 7. Activism and You
- 8. Energy, Healing and You
- 9. Building OLOC Community
- 10. Lesbians Empowered to Resist Race and Class
- 11. Lesbian Land Communities
- 12. The Well-being of You
- Mobilizing People of Faith as Allies to Our Movement
- 14. Timelines: Memoir Writing



Ellen Goodrich, 64, and Kostya Branwen Sudice, 63, share a few minutes at the banquet

An exciting panel presentation on "Ageism and Lesbophobia" included Shaba Barnes, Alix Dobkin, Mina Meyer, and Sharon Raphael. There was a legal clinic to offer information on elder law rights. Three new videos shown during free time attracted a standing-room-only crowd. (See page 3 for more details.)



OLOC's own, Alix Dobkin, 66, entertained the crowd Saturday evening.

The banquet buffet on Saturday evening in the hotel ballroom began a fine social evening that featured awards to prominent Old Lesbians and organizations: to Catherine Nicholson, founder of the lesbian magazine, Sinister Wisdom; to Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon (in absentia), founders of Daughters of Bilitis; to Ladyslipper Music; to Astrea, Lesbian Foundation for Justice; and to the National Action Foundation.

Saturday evening also included a concert by Alix Dobkin who had Old Lesbians standing on their feet with strong energy and admiration. Following the concert, the dance floor was very crowded. Big smiles were on all the faces.

A silent auction to benefit OLOC was held for the first time. Beautifully designed

article concluded on page 3...

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...Gathering article concluded

by Shaba Barnes, the auction raised \$2,100. Successful bidders went home with fine crafts, gift certificates, a week at a Cape Cod cottage, and many other items.

The event concluded with a Memorial honoring our foremothers planned by Shaba Barnes. A fine visual presentation featured photos of many women whose names appear on our OLOC Memorial Plaque. Participants were invited to name and honor women in their own lives, placing a rose petal in a bowl of water as their names were called out.

Tell the people you love that you love them at every opportunity. Remember, life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.

Videos Shown at the Gathering

The following three videos were shown and enthusiastically received at the recent Gathering:

High Heels on Wheels, by filmmakers Donna Cassyd and Leslie Sloan, about the Lesbians in the Roller Derby in the 1940s, 50s and 60s.

Fairness For All Families, distributed by the South Carolina Equality Coalition to fight against amending the state constitution to ban any form of legal recognition or protection for Gays, Lesbians, and their families. The election is this November.

The Dyke March, filmed by Cathy Cade of the march held in San Francisco the night before the giant, annual Gay Pride March. Multicultural and multiracial, it makes you want to attend the next one.

My Gathering Experience by Patricia Voelker

I wasn't sure what to expect when I googled "old lesbians" earlier this summer and stumbled across OLOC's website but, when I saw the conference would be close enough to drive, I knew I had to go.

This was the first gathering in which I, at 66, wasn't the oldest person — lesbian or not. That, in itself, brought personal challenges and insight. I thought I was the only "late bloomer" there until I brought up that issue in the fishbowl and discovered I was one among many. As more and more told of coming out... or having mothers who came out... in their 60's, I lost that alone feeling.

I met one interesting woman after another. I heard so much laughter and spirited conversation that I had to leave the room occasionally just to rest my ears! The group who kept the hospitality suite stocked were a true blessing.

This was a wonderful, eye-opening experience. I'm so glad OLOC came South just when I was ready to attend. Alix's concert was great and I'd love to have the words to the "terrorist" song. All the meetings I attended were well-worth my time. The memorial spoke to a need deep in the heart of individual and group. Those who hurried to minister with grace and presence to one who was grieving freely for the first time were truly angels.

Lastly, I was surprised at the number of women who spoke of activism but aren't out. I'm told that's because it wasn't safe to come out when younger so they moved away from family to live an activist lifestyle. That's another part of my learning curve. For all I learned and for all I have yet to learn, I thank the lesbians of OLOC for your part in my education.

Ageism and Lesbophobia: Overview for Panel by Sharon Raphael, Ph.D., 65

OLOC is in an unusual position to carry on the tradition of its founders and early pioneers, women like Barbara MacDonald, Baba Copper, and Shevy Healy, who saw prejudice toward old people from the unique position of being feminists and Lesbians. Standing outside the traditional heterosexist fold, these women

could see the importance of resisting stereotyped ideas of what old women — and in this case what old Lesbians — should be and do with their lives despite the great obstacles involved in living in an ageist and sexist society.

The purpose of this panel is to challenge and encourage all of us to continue to fight lesbophobic, ageist, and sexist thinking and behavior that might get in the way of our leading fulfilling and creative lives.

These are some of the traps we can fall into that keep us from being the old Lesbians we would like to be, free to make our own choices about our destinies and purpose in life.

Invisibility. Old people in general are not seen as sexual beings. The ideas of sexuality and oldness do not sit well with younger people because they assume oldness and sexuality are mutually exclusive. Women with gray hair and wrinkles tend to be viewed as helpless grandmotherly figures.

Some old Lesbians use this burden to their advantage, avoiding a kind of visibility that might make them, in certain situations, vulnerable to lesbophobia. On the other hand, consistently avoiding visibility as Lesbians can work at cross purposes with the identity we have about who we are and how it may affect what we want to do with our lives in later life.



Each Lesbian must choose for herself how far up the visibility road she wants to go.

Ageism in the LGBT community. Although changes have taken place, in part as a result of the work OLOC has done, there is a need for old Lesbians to resist the prejudices and fears among others

about aging, which at times affect our lives in negative ways. In group settings we often are not treated as equals. Barbara McDonald, in Look Me in the Eye, drew our attention to younger Lesbians putting us on pedestals and using us as the mothers they would have wanted, a practice that keeps both young and old from equal and healthy relationships.

Sexism in our society. This trap is hard to overcome but not hard to fight against and be aware of. Women have second-class status, and Lesbians even less status; therefore, if we add the category "old," that is a triple stigma. Add a few other categories — race, class, or disability — and we can see the stigmatization becoming very weighty, indeed. One reason we form groups like OLOC is to change the way society uses these stereotypical ways of classifying people.

Lesbophobia is an ism that affects us most profoundly as we grow old. Many Lesbians avoid institutions that serve older adults out of fear of being discovered or being mistreated or both. Not having the safeguards of marriage equality affects the security of those of us who have partners. Discrimination against Lesbians in assisted care and nursing facilities has been documented.

OLOC is a lesbian organization that affirms aging and helps us identify in a positive way

with the term OLD. This is a powerful idea, a very feminist idea, and one that is very unpopular out there in the so-called "real world."

OLOC needs to affirm the term *Lesbian* in the same way as we affirm and take on the word *Old*. Just as Lesbians gave the muchneeded woman power to many aspects of the feminist movement, it is Old Lesbians who are intellectually in the vanguard of truly understanding what ageism does to old women and who are acting as role models for what to do to avoid the pitfalls of ageism. But the problem is that old women are not listening to us to any large degree, in part because of their own lesbophobia — which we must fight not only for our own self-interest but also in order to be heard.

OLD Lesbians Organizing for Change has a unique opportunity to share what we have learned, but we must educate and change ourselves, integrating these ideas on a personal level so we can reach out to the wider world and make a big noise collectively and as individuals.

To see the unedited version of this article on Ageism and Lesbophobia go to Sharon's blog at www.leftturnonrights.blogspot.com/

OLOC Statement of Purpose

Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC) is a national organization of Lesbians 60 and over. We are committed to networking with Old Lesbians everywhere in order to:

- confront ageism within our own and the larger community.
- explore who we are and name our oppression.
- analyze our experience of ageism which has been so little defined.
- develop and distribute educational material.
- facilitate formation of new groups and refocusing of old groups to confront ageism.
- make our presence a visible force in the women's movement.

We want to celebrate our differences and affirm the diversity of our races, our ethnicities, our class backgrounds, our herstories, and our present lives.

Housing Workshop Report Sally Tatnall, 64

In our session we talked about what we desired and how we might achieve those desires. We want Lesbian/Gay-friendly caretakers when needed, diversity and acceptance. We do not want to be isolated. We want the maintenance of living to be taken care of. We want mobility and the ability to stay in the area in which we currently live. We want to live with Lesbians and not have a corporate set-up. Most important was staying independent as long as possible.

For the most part, everyone in the session liked where she lived and was not willing to compromise very much to achieve all the desires she had. Some women live alone, others with a partner. There was talk of some Lesbians getting together to live and pay



for the work they became unable to do as they aged. This raised the issue of private space vs. shared space.

Some women lived on land in

the country and had other other Lesbians in their community. These women seemed well organized but were still anxious about declining old age. One of the land groups is already experimenting with adult day care. One question was, "How can I stay in the country?" The need for the city when we cannot do what we have to was clear. While most women are able to live their whole lives in the home of their choosing, there is still concern about being placed in a nursing home. The Lesbians in this session expressed an interest in OLOC's acting as a clearinghouse for information on housing options.

Making a Statement in Minnesota! Jo Hiner, 80

As a member of OLOC, I was asked to take part in the most amazing exhibit. Maybe if it had happened in San Francisco, it would not have been surprising, but in Minneapolis? It seems that the diversity office in our county courthouse was planning a 21-window exhibit of local GLBT organizations. Can you imagine? Would your county courthouse do this? As one of our members said, "...and none of us is being held here until the judge can see us!"

Yes, it was amazing! Twenty-one huge windows covering 17 different Gay groups: Rainbow families, the high school group, our two libraries, health groups, and, of course, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change.

The display stayed up a month, and a reception was held simultaneously for the GLBT Archives, Libraries, Museums, and Special Collections Conference, which was holding its first international conference here.

Many of you may know Barbara Gittings, one of the event's keynote speakers. It was a thrill for me to meet her at that time!

So, hey — you other OLOC regional groups out there — let's see what you can do!



The OLOC exhibit in the Hennepin County Courthouse (in Minneapolis, MN) featured enlargements of the age-postive greeting cards produced by the local OLOC contingent, an OLOC T-shirt, copies of The Reporter and a scrapbook filled with photos and articles regarding OLOC's work in Minnesota.



OLOC Sisters At The Gay Games

Several OLOC members participated in the Gay Games held in Chicago in July. Scottie from Houston, age 71, won 2 Bronze medals, 1 in women's doubles and 1 in women's singles tennis, playing against a 36 year old. Saundra Tlgnor, age 69, from Glendale CA also competed in badminton. Scottie was interviewed for a story about the Gay Games in Houston's OutSmart magazine. When the interviewer called her "young lady" she immediately responded "Don't call me young lady — I am old", mentioning that she is a member of OLOC.

"Scottie" Scott as pictured in OutSmart magazine.

Lobbying for Our Rights

For many years, Minnesota's GLBT community has been educated and prompted to show up at an annual Capitol Day arranged by OutFront Minnesota. A full-time lobbyist represents our community throughout the year, gathering information for the legislators and fighting the myths and deliberate misinformation received from those who oppose us. Each year, the justFair Lobby Day brings thousands of people (about 5,000 this year) to the state Capitol to show our legislators that fairness and equal opportunity are Minnesota values that can't be trampled. OLOC member, Annalee Stewart, seen on the Capitol steps, joined a large group to lobby aggressively and successfully against the anti-marriage amendment.



Annalee Stewart lobbying the Minnesota State Legislature on behalf of old Lesbians.

Send Us Your OLOC News!



The Ohio OLOC group had is public coming out in May at a rally sponsored by the Single Payer Action Network supporting universal health care. The banner is being held on the steps of the Ohio State Capitol. There is an effort in Ohio to get this issue on the ballot.

St. Louis Oloc

PROMO is Missouri's statewide LGBT civil rights lobby. OLOC just spoke at their June St. Louis chapter meeting. The June 8 meeting focused on Aging Gay. Topics that were discussed included: Ageism: The LGBTQ community seems especially keen on ignoring and/or discriminating against the older members of the community; The relevance of "beauty" to the gay community enforces the systemic belief that "old" is unattractive and undesirable; Language shapes our awareness of and sensitivity to age; it was recommended that the community embrace and/or reclaim and value "old" as opposed to "elderly", "senior", and such words that politely steer away from the negativity associated with "old".

Housing: We still face blatant discrimination in housing choices. An example was given of two women trying to buy a condo together, but getting caught in the trap of the condo association or developer not allowing non-family or "unrelated" persons to invest together.

Taking care of our selves/our own. We need to create what we need - hear the needs of the community and create the responses.

Regarding organizations and online resources, this reference was suggested from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force website: http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/SeniorResources.pdf.

Beyond Recall Reviewed by Rainbow Williams

Beyond Recall by Mary Meigs, ed. Lise Weil, Talonbooks, Vancouver, 2005; ISBN-088922-505-2

This precious book was recently sent to me by Lesbian friends from Canada who knew Mary and were part of her network of friends and caregivers. This book felt as familiar and trustworthy as the hands of an old friend.

With a fondness for reality that was manifest in her life, *Beyond Recall* is Mary's journey into her own aging and dying. Her writing is radiant with spirit, truth, and beauty, and it sparkles with her wit.

Here was a Lesbian sister who was connected with our own Florida community: Sugarloaf Key Womens' Village, and it refers to Ruth Dreamdigger and Barbara Deming and their conscious dying.

In 1988 I saw the film Company of Strangers, a loosely scripted affair by the Canadian filmboard. That's how I first got to "meet" Mary playing herself, with six other women who were not Lesbians. In the film, the bus they are traveling on breaks down and leaves the women "shipwrecked" with each other for a period of time, during which they improvise and face their demons. Even in the film Mary had her note/sketch book and watercolors, which continued to be her daily companions.

Here is part of a speech she worked on to be delivered at OLOC:

The dying process has become the subject of a vast field of study. The idea is to provide a setting of care and friendliness, with interests and activities that will prevent people from feeling abandoned. To me the most successful of these environments falls short of the caring for dying friends in a lesbian community by a

support group that views death as a final kind of sharing.

Barbara Deming took us into her own fear and pain toward the acceptance of her own death; so did Ruth Dreamdigger. Each of them took charge of their own deaths, surrounded by loving friends and such grace and generosity of spirit that friends and family present felt honored and included.

The lesbian community at Sugarloaf Key has learned from experience that a dying friend's deepest need, even when she cannot speak, is to be listened to. (OLOC Reporter, Fall 1999)

Mary Meigs continued to write and draw and paint her lovely watercolors. Freewriting, a new technique for Mary, resulted in some stunning poems and journal entries.

Mary gifted us with her dreams, fears, and penetrating discussions of everything that was in her mind. This is a book I want to keep and give away to every dear friend.

(Published in *Mama Raga* February 2006) (Published in *Sinister Wisdom*, Summer 2006)

The OLOC Reporter

The OLOC Reporter is published by Old Lesbians Organizing for Change:

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The OLOC Reporter is produced throught the collective efforts of many women.

Let your voice be heard.

Deadline for the next issue is November 1, 2006. Send articles to OLOC: info@oloc.org or OLOC, PO Box 5853, Athens, OH 45701

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Please use the form on page 11

OLOC SC To Meet In Portland

Portland, Oregon is the site of the next OLOC Steering Committee meeting October 12-15. Women from nearby areas in Oregon and Washington are invited to be part of planning for expansion of OLOC's presence in the area. There will be a gathering at 3 pm in Portland on Saturday Oct. 14 followed by dinner out together. For details contact us at: info@oloc.org or by phone at 505-856-1290 or 740-448-6424.

Participants Needed for Study

Are you in a same-sex relationship that has lasted over 10 years? Are you over the age of 50? We invite you and your partner to complete a survey that asks questions regarding what helps your relationship work, as well as what are some difficulties. We would like both you and your partner to complete the survey individually. These two surveys can be completed online or through the mail and will take 20 minutes of your time. If interested, or if you have questions, please contact: glstudy@umn.edu or call 1-800-779-8636 and ask for Jean K. Ouam.

Social Work faculty at the University of Minnesota and St. Cloud State University are conducting this study. All information gathered will be kept confidential and no names will be associated with any data collected or reported. No compensation will be made for participation.

LGBT Aging Roundtable

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has convened an LGBT Aging Roundtable. It met for the first time in Washington DC in May 2006. OLOC was represented by Co-Director Jan Griesinger. Groups at the table included LGBT community centers, Griot, Senior Centers, American Society on Aging's Lesbian Gay Aging Issues Network, Gay Men of African Descent. OLOC was, once again, the organization that emphasized the word "ageism" and urged that in regard to policy there be "nothing about us without us." The event broke into 4 focus groups - diversity, ageism, national issues and visibility. Many who work with LGBT old people expressed their sense of invisibility in the senior service arena and also LGBT communities. A number of others at the table expressed appreciation for the perspective that OLOC brings that focuses beyond "our needs" and points to the way in which ageism is a divide and conquer tactic used politically for the advancement of others.

Regional OLOC Group Contact List

OLOC would love to have regional groups form all over the country! If you're interested in helping form a group, email us at info@oloc.org or write or call Jan in Athens, OH. (see below)

Minnesota	Annalee Stewart	612-724-6541	stewie4@mac.com
Portland, OR	Mary Beth Brindley	503-286-3575	calinpdx@aol.com
Denver	Emily Lewis	303-440-8767	emilylew@earthnet.net
St. Louis	Charlotte Ellis	314-962-2188	cellis@wustl.edu
Ohio	Sally Tatnall	216-932-0977	tatnalls@yahoo.com
Northern Colorado	Cindy Bear	303-258-9424	msdivide@yahoo.com
San Francisco Bay Area	Joan Emerson, OLOC/The	e Women's Building	3543 18th St

San Francisco, CA, 94110

Sisters by Jean Eckerly, M.D., 68

A young wife sat on a sofa on a hot, humid day, drinking iced tea and visiting with her mother. As they talked about life, about marriage, about the responsibilies of life and the obligations of adulthood, the mother clinked the ice cubes in her glass thoughtfully and turned a clear, sober gaze upon her daughter.

"Don't forget your Sisters," she advised, swirling the tea leaves to the bottom of her glass. "They'll be more important as you get older. No matter how much you love your husband, no matter how much you love the children you may have, you are still going to need Sisters. Remember to go places with them now and then; do things with them.

"Remember that Sisters means all the women...your girlfriends, your daughters, and all your other women relatives, too. You'll need other women. Women always do."

What a strange piece of advice, the young woman thought. Haven't I just gotten married? Haven't I just joined the couple-world? I'm now a married woman, for goodness' sake! A grownup! Surely my husband and the family we may start will be all I need to make my life worthwhile!

Nevertheless, she listened to her mother. She kept contact with her Sisters and made more women friends every year. As the years tumbled by, she came to understand that her mom knew what she was talking about. As time and nature work their changes and their mysteries upon a woman, Sisters are the mainstay of her life.

After more than fifty years of living in this world, here is what I've learned:

Time Passes... Life Happens... Distance Separates... Jobs Come And Go... Love Waxes And Wanes...Men Don't Do What They're Supposed To Do... Hearts Break... Parents Die... Colleagues Forget Favors... Careers End... But...

Sisters are there, no matter how much time and how many miles are between you. A girlfriend is never farther away than needing her can reach.

When you have to walk the Lonesome Valley and you have to walk it by yourself, the women in your life will be on the valley's rim, cheering you on, praying for you, pulling for you, intervening on your behalf, and waiting for you with open arms at valley's end.

Sometimes they will even break the rules and walk beside you. Or come and carry you out.

Girlfriends, daughters, granddaughters, daughters-in-law, sisters, sisters-in-law, mothers, mothers-in-law, grandmothers, aunts, nieces, cousins, and extended family all bless our life.

The world wouldn't be the same without women and neither would !!

When we began this adventure called womanhood, we had no idea of the incredible joys or sorrows that lay ahead. Nor did we know how much we would need each other. Every day, we need each other still.

Pass this on to all the women who help make your life meaningful. I just did.

Contact List for Current Steering Committee Members				
Co-Directors:	_			
Shaba Barnes, Albuquerque NM	Smokeyb2196@msn.com	(505) 856-1290		
Jan Griesinger, Athens OH	ucmjan@frognet.net	(740) 448-6424		
Steering Committee Members:				
Mary Henry, University Place WA	mandm@mandmcentral.com	(253) 565-0829		
Sally Tatnall, Cleveland Heights OH	Tatnalls@yahoo.com	(216) 932-0977		
Mina Meyer, Long Beach CA	minakay@aol.com	(562) 420-3555		

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Lesbians 60 and over: We urge you to subscribe to *The Reporter* as an expression of your commitment to be with old Lesbians in your own area, working to confront ageism. If no such group exists, become an OLOC Contact Woman and work with a mentor to start a local group. If you are not yet 60, we welcome you as a Supporter. By giving OLOC your generous financial contribution you can show your commitment and support for challenging ageism.

Please check all that apply:				
I am (we are) 60 or over and wish subscribe (or renew) my (our) cur subscription to <i>The Reporter</i> . \$25 to \$50 for a one-year subscrip	rent Please accept my (our) tax-deductible contribution of \$ or my (our) pledge of			
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