



Our Essential Third Place (with Home and Work): The Feminist/Lesbian Bookstore

An OLOC Zoom Panel Presentation
Thursday, August 20, 2020

<https://youtu.be/7zC2d5VGqIk>

How feminist/Lesbian bookstores supported and advanced Lesbian cultures and communities. From this herstorical journey, former booksellers recall the best of our past activisms and share what we can learn from those experiences to create energies for our futures as Old Lesbians.

This is an edited version of notes from the chat board that happened during this event. Participants added comments throughout. These are the comments that add to what the presenters were discussing.

Some Bookstores Mentioned:

- Womencrafts
- Great to see Beth Dingman from New Victoria printers/publishers here. Fan the Flames Bookstore, Columbus, Ohio: anyone here connected to that?
- I loved that Alison Bechdel set many of her drawings in a bookstore with all the personalities creating wonderful Lesbian situations.
- *Dykes to Watch Out For* used Amazon Bookstore in Minneapolis, Minnesota, as the model.
- Does anyone remember the name of the feminist bookstore in Seattle, Washington?
- In Richmond, Virginia, we had Labrys Books and Richmond Women's Books (co-op), which we started to fill the gap when Labrys closed.
- Perhaps *Lesbian Connection* will remember the names of previous bookstores, per their archives in advertising, etc.
- We drove from Little Rock, Arkansas, to Memphis, Tennessee, to go to Meristem Bookstore.
- In Denver, Colorado, we had Woman to Woman Feminist Bookstore, a collective, and *Big Mama Rag*, a newspaper.
- I practically lived at Lioness Books in Sacramento, California.



- Woman to Woman Bookstore in Denver, Colorado, in 1977. And *Big Mama Rag* newspaper. It was quite a time.
- There was a wonderful place in Providence, Rhode Island, for a few years, “Visions and Voices.”
- I think the name of the Seattle, Washington, women's bookstore was "It's About Time." That's my memory; it folded about the time I moved here in 1985.
- I still miss Lammas Bookstore from DC in the 1970s!
- ICI is A Woman’s Place Books in Oakland, California. It moved to Mama Bears Books, which lasted until the mid-1990s.
- Sisterspirit in San Jose, California, 1983—.
- Any women’s bookstores left? I saw one in 2013 in Madison, Wisconsin. [Editor’s Note – Mev has compiled a resource list of bookstore resources and will share via the next E-News. In the meantime, check out the resource list available on the OLOC website, - a listing of stores there and also at Charis Books in Atlanta, Georgia.]
- Thanks to New Words in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Bloodroot in Connecticut.
- Bookwoman - Austin, Texas (still open).
- Eleanor Batchelder and Karyn London, from long ago Womanbooks, NUC.
- Dotty Faibisy from Wild Iris books is here.

Some Things that Bookstores Did to Help Lesbian Communities:

- Let's not forget women's music.
- Yes, my thought exactly; women's music!
- Bookstores advertised music events! Yes!
- When my first collection of short stories came out, *Hot Chicken Wings*, I went around the country giving performances at all the feminist bookstores! It was fantastic. Jyl Lynn Felman
- From Martha Bellinger: I learned to be a better Lesbian feminist/partner from a Lesbian-feminist bookstore in Chelsea, Massachusetts. I will never forget those trips to the bookstore in 1974-75.
- I grew up as a Lesbian at New Words in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I was already a feminist, but had recently escaped/relocated to the Boston, Massachusetts, area. Saved me in many ways, many times over.
- San Diego, California women’s bookstore later sold CDs; besides, they had all kinds of newsletters ... meeting other Lesbians was prime.



- Jyl Lynn Felman: I read at the San Diego bookstore but can't remember the name of the bookstore!
- In addition to women's music, LF publications were very intertwined with the wonderful bookstores!
- Thank goodness for Old Wives Tales and ICI Bookstore. It saved a lot of lives. I so miss having a bookstore.
- Lammas was awesome, my first women's bookstore, and my introduction to feminist and Lesbian books, LOTs of them!
- Before this session is over, I'd like to thank all the bookstore owners and workers for enriching and changing my life when my sexual orientation as a Lesbian became obvious to me in 1973.
- I lived near Lammas at first and it was crucial to be able to go there, to be in Lesbian space and read Lesbian books!
- From Gilda Bruckman [worked at New Words Bookstore in Cambridge, Massachusetts]: Thanks, Lynne and Rochelle—Our community made us what we were able to be!
- We need to support our bookstores, Lesbian groups, etc.
- Thanks to Mev and all the panelists for your invaluable work. Women's bookstores were/are very important in my life. Gracias!!!
- Faye is tenacious and always creating great events! [Faye Williams, Sisterspace Books]
- The Lesbian bookstores were a distribution point for all the Lesbian newsletters of that time.

Additional Questions—Some Answered by the Panelists:

- Where did the funding come from?
- Does Carol Seajay have any memorabilia from Old Wives Tales for sale?
- Was the Full Moon CoffeeHouse and Bookstore (SF) the first bookstore?
- Anyone remember the name of the women's bookstore in St. Louis/U City in the 1980s? I volunteered for many work shifts there.

Some Resources Mentioned:

- From Sharon Thompson: Lesbian Home Movie Project (LHMP) archives, preserves, and digitizes home movies and tapes in return for assistance documenting the images. If you have any, get in touch with me, sharonthompson12@gmail.com.



- From margy lesher: In case anyone here doesn't already know, *Lesbian Connection* is still the FREE worldwide magazine for, by, and about Lesbians. Sign up at www.LCOnline.org.
- LC is free, but they suggest \$7 per issue. We just send a donation once or twice a year.
- LC is a lifeline to the world of Lesbians, everywhere.
- You can read about feminist bookstores in the most recent issue of *Sinister Wisdom*, vol. 116 (April 2020). See <http://sinisterwisdom.org/>.
- *Sinister Wisdom* issue 116 "Making Connections" ... great research on women's bookstores in the South! Thank you Rose, Merrill, and Kate.
- Cambridge, Massachusetts has developed feminist history tours. The first included New Words, and Gilda was very instrumental in starting this.
- There is a Lesbian Meet-Up group in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where lots of Lesbians meet each other at potlucks and hikes. But it is not active now because of COVID-19.
- Mama's Club in Gainesville, Florida, mentioned by Faye <https://www.facebook.com/mamasclubgainesville>.
- There are many alternatives to Amazon. Our still-existing stores have online book ordering. I use Women and Children First in Chicago, Illinois.
- All Ladyslipper print catalogs are archived online at Duke: <https://repository.duke.edu/dc/ladyslipper>.
- Michigan State University Special Collections has Goldenrod and Michigan Womyn's Music Festival and *Hot Wires* and *Lesbian Connection* and much more. They love these archives and are taking excellent care and have made them accessible on a finder's guide.
- OLOHP (Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project) is actively doing interviews via Zoom and other media. If you would like to be interviewed get in touch via our website at <https://olohp.org/index.html>.
- Goldenrod Music's archives are at <https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/c.php?g=96181&p=6586313>.
- Should anyone wish a new Lesbian romance novel or two for free, email me at judgebellinger@aol.com and I am encouraging a donation by you to OLOC. I will pay the postage. *The Two Ruths* and *She Who Is Without Sin* are geared toward Old Lesbians who survived through the 1950s and beyond. (Martha Bellinger)



Additional Comments:

- Hi Madeline, so great to know you are still around. Thanks for everything back then! [Editor's Note: Madeline Zadick from Lunaria in Northampton, Massachusetts.]
- I'm so glad this is being recorded! Important herstory that younger Lesbians want to know, like my Lesbian niece.
- IF there's time, could you ask them how much their experience(s) were reflected by *Dykes to Watch Out For*?
- Would love to have a future discussion about archiving our memorabilia and our personal herstories of the women in print movement.
- Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York City is a place to put your memorabilia. Contact them first.
- There was also the issue of competition from Borders and Barnes and Noble.
- And if non-profit, those were zero-earning years as far as Social Security.
- There are several neighborhood groups, all under the umbrella of Puget Sound OLOC in Seattle, Washington. Now they are meeting regularly on Zoom and experimenting with in-person, physically-distanced events. There are also other groups in Seattle and environs doing similar things. Yesterday I met on Zoom with a group representing 11 or 12 LGBT (many L) groups in the Puget Sound Area.
- Nothing great would ever get done if people knew what they were getting into! Like having a baby, for example.
- Young Lesbians are hungry for this stuff and to hear our stories! They are being turned away from LGBT centers for not being "inclusive" by being Lesbians.

Thanks...

- Thanks to all of you speakers...this was very informative and enjoyable ... have to leave.
- Thank you to the women who organized this and the women on the roundtable. So appreciate your time and sharing your stories.
- Thank you so much! Wish we could hang out for another few days together for further conversation!
- GLORIOUS PANEL!!!!!! Thank you to all the Lesbian feminist bookstores that made women's culture, and women's music in particular, available to the women's community at large. I propose that OLOC offer the community a



panel focused on women's music in the future. I will help organize this in any way I can.

- So many thanks to all the participants—for all the ways we brought our visions into being—and everything we **still** are doing.

From Ruth Debra: Donate at <https://oloc.org/>, or you can call me and I'll take your cc through Square if you don't like to do it online (760-318-6794), or send a check to OLOC.