

Bay Area OLOC



Old Lesbians Organizing for Change

Newsletter – May, 2025

This group of old dykes is about empowerment and visibility, moving into the next phase of our lives with panache and activism, talking about difficult topics including our inevitable deaths, long-term planning, community and connection. Open to old lesbians 60 and over.

CALENDAR UPDATE:

Look over these dates and events to see what you need to know!

- **Richmond Pride, Sunday, June 1st** – OLOC will have a booth at Civic Center Plaza from 11:00 – 4:00. Stop by and visit!
- **Financial assistance applications to attend OLOC's National Gathering in Columbus, OH, August 20th – 24th are due June 1st**
Active OLOC members can apply to National OLOC for transportation and hotel assistance, and to Bay Area OLOC to cover registration. Several meals are included. Early bird registration ends June 15th. August 20th is a Lesbians of Color Day, full Gathering opens August 21st.
- **Queer Women of Color Media Arts Project free Film Festival at the Presidion in SF runs June 13th – 15th**. Bay Area OLOC will be featured as a Community Partner on Saturday, June 14, at the 5:00 pm show. Info on shuttles available from BART and the Pacific Center in Berkeley is available on the website when you register. Check out the full schedule with screenings and events for all three days at QWOCMAP.org. The films will stream on-line later in the year.
- **Bay Area OLOC's Outdoor Pot Luck is Sunday, July 20th, at Live Oak Park, Berkeley, 12:00 to 4:00 pm**. OLOC will hold our annual picnic again at the site outside the Berkeley Art Center. Reconnect with old friends and meet new ones. Paratransit service is available. We don't barbeque, so there's no smoke.
- **Dates for Bay Area OLOC's Fall Retreat at Enchanted Hills have changed! The new dates are September 19th – 21th, 2025**. See the article about our last retreat for more information.
- **Autumn Tea Dance, Saturday, October 25, 2025** at the Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarians at the corner of Cedar and Bonita. We'll have a live band again!

HISTORY & CHANGE AT ENCHANTED HILLS

By Laura Tow

As I write this, 47 of us are just back from our spring weekend retreat at Enchanted Hills Camp in the Napa hills. This was the largest group we've ever had! We truly felt like a village, old timers and newcomers all mingling, making friends and sharing experiences.

Happily we will have another opportunity to enjoy Enchanted Hills this year – our fall retreat dates are Friday through Sunday, September 19-21.

Registration materials will be sent out mid-August. **Note that these are revised dates.**



Our first retreat at Enchanted Hills was 10 years ago. We've been back each year since, except for the Covid years and a year when wildfires threatened and impacted the camp. Lighthouse for the Blind – San Francisco, which owns and operates the camp, considers us one of their “legacy” groups due to our having been associated with them for so long.

Enchanted Hills has gone through many changes. It was designed to be enjoyed by blind and limited vision children and adults. There are no stairs and many ADA accommodations. The facilities originally consisted of older buildings: small cabins, a lodge with multiple sleeping rooms and two shared bathrooms, and an all-purpose meeting hall/dining room with a commercial kitchen. We enjoyed a heated pool with solid wood perimeter fencing. Given the privacy, swimsuits were optional. Even when our group was as few as 30, we'd be the only guests at Camp on our weekends.

Over the past five years, the camp has expanded greatly. There's a spacious new dining hall and kitchen, a larger pool house, and numerous cabins spread over a new portion of the rolling, wooded hillsides. The new fencing around the pool is open wire. At this retreat for the first time, we were not the only group of guests, sharing staggered mealtimes. It is likely that from now on this will be the case. We'll continue to have private access to the pool but can no longer swim nude or partially nude anymore.

Staff has expanded and transport alternatives have been developed so less mobile guests can access the pool and the new dining room. The meals at this retreat were the best ever. While there are still issues to be resolved, the Lighthouse organization is continuing to improve Enchanted Hills to make it into a more attractive conference site. They now even have chargers for electric vehicles! Other groups will be onsite when we are there in the

future, but we have been assured of our own meeting spaces, separated dining spaces, and private pool times.

The Lighthouse organization has always been LGBTQIA positive, actively supporting diversity in large and small ways. Clearly this major expansion has been a labor of love for all those associated with the Lighthouse. As Bay Area OLOC's liaison with Enchanted Hills, I feel we are fortunate to be able to hold our retreats there. It is the only venue we are aware of that comes close to meeting our needs. It is affordable, located in a peaceful natural setting within two hours of the central Bay Area, with semi-private indoor sleeping rooms, a large hall and smaller meeting spaces, excellent dining services, no stairs anywhere, disability friendly accommodations, overall privacy for our group, and a pool!

We are hoping to see many of you at Enchanted Hills in September!

The Spring Retreat Was a Huge Success!

by Susan Chacin

Laura Tow, our fearless retreat organizer and registrar, writes above about the evolution of the Enchanted Hills facilities. Her prep work with Enchanted Hills staff helped us in many ways. She worked out menus that were delicious, and, transportation around the camp this time was much better organized for those of us with mobility limitations than it had been last fall.

On Friday evening, Marta Wohl showed "A Mother's Heart," the first part of a moving documentary film she is producing about how her parents escaped the Holocaust. In this segment, we hear Marta's mother describe jumping off a moving train that would have taken her to a concentration camp. Returning to her village, Marta's mother meets her future husband who had been skeptical about her chances of survival. To be continued! Games and snacks were also on the agenda for the evening.



After the Saturday morning check-in circle where we got to know one another, the afternoon program featured Ruth Mahaney. She spoke eloquently about our activist history of confronting political issues and winning causes. Breaking up into small groups, participants had an opportunity to speak about how they are dealing with the general political crisis and finding time for personal pursuits and self-care.

Our traditional “Salon” talent show on Saturday evening was excellent! There were readings of stories and poetry, music, and a couple of scintillating performances. After singing the Old Lesbian Picnic song, games and snacks wrapped up the night.

Sunday morning’s Membership Meeting acquainted everyone with how Bay Area OLOC functions and gathered ideas for additional activities. Along with the ideas, women were recruited to bring their ideas into action. Some of these proposals include holding game-playing events, making time and space to show works of art, holding a reading of OLOC writers’ work with musical breaks, and singing together at our events. National OLOC Steering Committee members Michiko Thorne and gypsy tucker spoke about the National Gathering in Columbus Ohio, August 20 – 24, 2025, and how to access financial assistance to attend.



Comments on the Retreat:

“If I’d know the retreat was this much fun, I’d have come a long time ago.”

“You organized it so well, it was like a well-oiled machine!”

Did My Mother Have a Lesbian Affair? (It started in Columbus Ohio)

By Molly Martin

Rummaging through my mom’s scrapbooks from the 1930s, I came across a packet of letters. Carefully opening the tattered envelopes, I found hand-written notes on stationery from the Neil House Hotel in Columbus, Ohio. They looked to me like love notes—from a woman named Edna L. who often signed her name Eddie.

Florence, darlin’—Haven’t we had fun with meetings and parties and “baths” and rushin’ ‘round! And what am I going to do without you when you are gone? You will just have to come to New York sometime soon so we can share some other experiences....
Love and a hug—Edna L.

What did she mean “baths”? Oh My Goddess! Did my mother have a lesbian affair?

From other items saved in her scrapbook, I learned that my mother, Florence Wick, and Eddie had met up at YWCA gatherings in Chicago in 1937 and Columbus in 1938 where they roomed together. The Neil Hotel was one of the few spots in Columbus listed in the Green Book where African Americans were allowed to stay. That's likely why it was chosen as a meeting place by the YWCA, a beacon of anti-racist activism in 1938. Black women attended the YW meetings there. Sadly, the building has since been torn down.



Flo and friends – picture from Molly

It took me a few years to discover Eddie's identity. A big breakthrough came when I found her last name in a letter stuffed in another scrapbook. She was Edna Lauterbach, born in 1900. She lived in Brooklyn with her family. She worked in advertising and she was active in the Business and Professional Women's group within the YWCA. Just as my mother was in Yakima, Washington.

The letters convinced me that Eddie was at least a self-acknowledged lesbian who had a serious crush on my mother. There is so much more I want to know about her. Born at the cusp of the 20th century, Eddie would have been just the right age to experience the flowering of gay culture in New York City in the 1920s.

Did she know Eve Adams, the notorious lesbian who was arrested in 1926, jailed, later deported, and sent to Auschwitz where she and her lover were murdered? A Jewish radical lesbian foremother, Eve Adams came to the US in 1912. In 1925 she published the first American book with lesbian in the title, *Lesbian Love*. In that year she opened a café in Greenwich Village called *Eve's Hangout*, which became a destination for New York's bohemian contingent.

Did Eddie visit *Eve's Hangout*? I bet she knew about the place. She may have been afraid to visit, especially after Eve was arrested in 1926 by an undercover policewoman for "disorderly conduct," a charge that referred to her alleged sexual advances and for having written an "obscene" book.

The YWCA was at the forefront of the most critical social movements including women's empowerment and civil rights. The activism of Flo and Eddie set the stage for my generation's second wave of feminism and our gay rights movement.

My mother and her friends were activists in women's organizations who enjoyed working and playing together. Maybe being lovers then was not all about sex. If we expand our notion, then we can imagine a culture in which physical affection extended to all.

I was never able to confirm that Flo and Eddie were lovers. But maybe for women like my mother, the defining factor in a relationship was not sex. Maybe there's a third choice: the historian Lillian Faderman calls it romantic friendship. Maybe I should stop asking whether they had sex. Maybe I should start with love.

This is part of a longer story. You can read it on my blog:
<https://mollymartin.blog/2016/09/03/my-mothers-lesbian-affair/>
(Editor's note: Molly read this at the Retreat Salon!)

Listening to Our History – An Appreciation

By Jan Herzog

Ruth Mahaney, professor emerita of GLBT History at City College of San Francisco, gave a great presentation at the recent OLOC retreat. She also mentioned that she had been interviewed for a podcast about the Briggs Initiative (1978). As a youngster (now 71) living out of state, and not knowing I was a lesbian at the time, I think I only heard about the Briggs Initiative afterwards. I was aware of Anita Bryant and demonstrated against her in Tucson, Arizona where I was living in the late 70's. I eventually came out and organized one of the first Gay rights marches in Arizona in the early 80's but I completely missed Briggs.

Season 9 of "Slow Burn" (a Slate podcast focusing on past events that have a consequence on today), sub-titled "Gays Against Briggs" was terrific. The 8 episode podcast by Christina Cauterucci, a senior writer and producer focusing on GLBT/queer issues, is about the fight against the Briggs Initiative which sought to force the firing of gay teachers and anyone suspected of being a gay teacher. It was defeated because of a concerted effort by the gay community. I really suggest you give this a listen. If you were in California at the time and participated, it will take you down memory lane and if you're like me, it will be a learning/teaching experience. I continue to think about the podcast weeks after I listened to it. Portions of Ruth's interview air in several of the episodes but particularly in the last one.

GAMES, GAMES, GAMES!

An exciting development at the May retreat was that a group of ardent game-players volunteered to organize free-standing game events. Dates and venues are still being determined, but if you enjoy playing games, contact Karen Orlando at korlando1007@gmail.com or test her at (510) 725-7041 for information and notices.

Sign Up with National OLOC

**OLOC's National Gathering is coming up this August, 20th – 24th, 2025
Embassy Suites, Columbus Ohio**

Registration is open for the Gathering this year! Old Lesbians from all over the country, and a few from around the world, will gather in Columbus Ohio for our biennial convocation. **Early-bird registration ends on June 15th – check out all the information on the OLOC National Gathering Website.**

The theme this year is ***PREVAILING: Old Lesbians United for Our Future***. On Wednesday, August 20th there will be a session for Lesbians of Color. The full Gathering opens on Thursday with a Plenary led by Simma Lieberman. (Simma attended the Bay Area May retreat to get to know us!) The Gathering organizers are thrilled that the keynote speaker will be Washington State Supreme Court Justice G. Helen Whitener. Justice Whitener was appointed to the Court in 2020 and subsequently elected by voters twice to retain her position. Before becoming a judge, she was a prosecutor and defense attorney for 14 years.

Women who have attended a National Gathering report it as being a wonderful new experience. If you have participated in one, you may remember the excitement of seeing old friends and making new contacts. National OLOC and Bay Area OLOC collaborate so Old Lesbians have sources of financial support to attend. Be sure to affiliate with National OLOC to receive updates. **If you would like to present a workshop at the Gathering, an application form is on the OLOC Gathering website. Proposals are due June 1st.** There is also always time at the Gathering for Lesbians who share a common interest or concern to meet. Stay tuned and mark your calendar.

National OLOC Lets You Access More Old Lesbian Resources!

National OLOC offers a wonderful assortment of support groups, Zoom events, and other resources. Joining is easy, and dues are on an ability-to-pay basis. Members of national OLOC are termed “affiliates,” and you have to be connected as an affiliate to receive notices and links to their events. The website to gain access to all this is www.OLOC.org

Bay Area OLOC thrives thanks to our Organizing Committee:

A small Organizing Committee meets monthly on Zoom to keep Bay Area OLOC running. Members include: Pat Cull, Laura Tow, Ginny Garrett, Jeannine Toussaint, Tara Sterling, Jan Herzog, Susan Chacin, and Michiko Bailey Thorne. Michiko is also co-chair of OLOC's national Steering Committee.

Bay Area Newsletter:

The newsletter comes out when we have events to announce. We will send out a reminder about the Outdoor Potluck at the end of June, and a full newsletter to announce the fall retreat in mid August. Susan Chacin is the editor, and she is actively recruiting help now that she's turning 80! Laura Tow and Ginny Garrett help proof and edit the newsletter.

Photos in this edition: Tara Sterling contributed the pictures of Molly Martin and Judith Masur, Ruth Mahaney, and gypsy tucker and Ginny Garrett appearing in the articles about the retreat.

You are invited to send articles, poems, and other items for the newsletter to: susanchnew@gmail.com . (Please put OLOC NEWSLETTER in the subject line.) The newsletter and an occasional Bulletin come out periodically to announce upcoming events.

Most women on our mailing list receive the newsletter by email. A number have asked to also receive it by “snail mail.” If you are getting the newsletter in the mail and don't need a paper copy, let Pat Cull know. If you don't get it by mail but would like a paper copy, let Pat know that too. If we have your email, you'll get the newsletter by email unless you tell us otherwise. Contact Pat at: patcull70@gmail.com