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LITERARY OLDER LESBIANS: Anita Cornwall, Jeanette H. Foster, Hannah Blue Heron
(from 'Lesbian Muse - the women behind the words -1990)

(of pensioners' link)

Older Women's Project Newsletter

Summer 1991

Special focus this Quarter: Older Lesbian Women

Highlights: Older Lesbians meet - a conference report
Lesbian booklist
Living Alone and Loving It
Your poems and letters
Education and older women.

EDITORIAL

Thankyou to all the women who sent letters and messages of appreciation about OWP's last newsletter, which focussed on Black and Ethnic Older Women.

Thanks too, for the letters and poems you sent us (see Letters page at the back of this issue). Please keep it up! We need letters, articles, comments news and reviews of interest to older women.

This quarter's newsletter focusses on older lesbian women.

As we know, the attitude of our society to older women's emotional and sexual feelings and attachments is either to ignore that these feelings exist at all, or to view their existence as peculiar or even disgusting. As Pensioners Link Lesbian Workers Group point out- "predjudices that haunt younger gay men and women are also shown to older people and doubled because of society's feelings about older people in general."

Everyone has a right to have their sexual identity respected. Lesbian women can celebrate a long and hard herstory of fighting for that right.

Despite the problems created by sexist, heterosexist (the belief that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural sexuality), and ageist attitudes (which can exist within the lesbian community as well as outside it) older lesbian women are, and always have been, trying and succeeding to live and love as they choose.

Beryl Cross



THE LESBIAN ARCHIVE AND INFORMATION CENTRE

Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU 071 405 6475

RECLAIMING
THE PAST
RECORDING
THE PRESENT

The Archive has just lost its funding, so phone before you visit, or write, in case emergency premises have had to be sought out and staffing cut back.

Whatever happens, all the archive material will not be lost.

OLDER LESBIANS - FOCUSING ON OUR LIVES

A report on a Conference for Older Lesbians held in April 1991 at the London Women's Centre.

Pensioners' Link has been developing work with Older Lesbians over the past three years and has helped to establish groups in North London and Greenwich. The Lesbian Workers Group of PL has also met regularly with a small group of Older Lesbians during this time and have organised several outings, a Celebration for Older Lesbians, an Alternative Health Day, Video Afternoon and a number of social events. Older Lesbians have also taken part in a Housing Conference and Health Conference as well as helping to facilitate workshops on sexuality and residential care.

The conference this April was organised in response to the need expressed by Older Lesbians to get together to discuss various aspects of ageing, exchange information, and share feelings and thoughts about growing older.

The Conference gave women an opportunity to be involved in workshops - workshop titles included 'Fun'; 'Growing Old Disgracefully' and 'Bereavement and Loss'. There was a lot of positive and practical feedback from all of the workshops - to give just one example the women involved in the 'Growing Old Disgracefully' group consolidated their needs and aims as: needing more groups for older lesbians; taking risks; forming gay residential homes and accommodation; health and social workers needed to become more aware of lesbians and to make provisions for them; and wanting to change the public image of lesbians and challenge ageism by being more positive about ourselves.

After the workshop sessions there was a break for an evening meal, then many women attended a video showing of 'Women Like Us', an account of Older Lesbians lives originally shown on Channel 4 television.

The final event of the day was a social evening, with music from the 60's provided by "The Ponytails" a 60's style lesbian band. Everyone enjoyed this opportunity to socialise with other older lesbians and to sing and dance to the music.

Many women expressed their pleasure at being able to take part in this day, and remarked on the lively and happy atmosphere of the conference. For some women it had been their first opportunity to meet other older lesbians who were concerned about the issues around growing older and everyone expressed their enthusiasm and wish for another opportunity to get together.

Pensioners Link Lesbian Workers Group would like to thank all those who helped to make the day a success, especially those older lesbians who helped us plan the event. We intend to continue our work with older lesbians, and aim to plan future events.

Lesbian Workers Group, Pensioners Link.

"LET'S HAVE SOME FUN"

by Zelda Curtis

"Through their specific life experiences, older women have a unique contribution to make to a better world. They have always found such creative and inventive ways of dealing with problems" - these were views expressed by speakers at the launch of the "European Older Women's Project" by the Lewisham Equalities Development Unit as part of the action programme leading up to the European Year of Elderly People, 1993.

This unique Project, it is hoped, will link older women in Lewisham, Ireland, Italy, France and Germany and effect useful exchanges.

Great interest and enthusiasm was expressed by the older women, active in groups throughout Lewisham, who came together in the Civic Centre to discuss how best they could participate in the Project. They very much welcomed the links already effected through the Equalities Unit with "Progetto Donna" in Perugia, Italy, and with "Age and Opportunity" in Ireland, as well as the first feelers put out to groups in Antony, Paris and in Charlottenburg, Berlin - both towns already twinned with Lewisham. The women were unanimous in their support for the aims of the European Commission to deepen the understanding between older women across Europe and to strengthen the links between generations. They felt the new Project could play a very useful part in that.

As the theme of the Project is the contribution that older women can and do make to their communities from the variety of their life experiences, the women wanted to find new and exciting ways of sharing these with different groups in Lewisham as well as groups across Europe.

This exchange could consist of written material, photographs, audio/visual tapes and other materials reflecting the lives of older women. Suggestions made were exchanges of information on health care and community care in the respective countries and finding out how these services were organised. It was felt that a particularly useful contribution Lewisham could make would be to share the experiences of older women who have been migrants and those who have been refugees. The EC are very interested in this because of the expected greater movement of peoples within the Community after 1992.

There were very lively discussions and numerous ideas elaborated, but the nitty-gritty of the work programme has yet to be worked on. How that programme is to be achieved, how it is to be fleshed out and put into practice - well, that's the hard part! But the women present and the representatives of local groups who have been nominated on to the Advisory Steering Group of the Project seem to be ready and willing to take on the task.

Having seen their enthusiasm I am sure of the success of the Project - and just as certain that the older women both in Lewisham and in Europe will have lots of fun in their exchanges.

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WALTHAM FOREST OLDER WOMEN'S GROUP REPORTS BACK

Waltham Forest Older Women's group have been very busy over the past few months. Their activities have included producing a new publicity pamphlet for the group (and handing these out in the local shopping centre!); visiting the Feminist Library where they were given a warm welcome and found a huge selection of interesting books and information; and meeting with girls from a local school to exchange ideas and information (see above pic).

Waltham Forest Older Women's Group welcomes new members - any Waltham Forest woman aged 50+ is welcome to attend meetings - 2-4pm on Wednesdays at Waltham Forest Women's Centre.

For more info please contact The Older Women's Project.

Beryl Cross

BLACK AND ETHNIC MINORITY OLDER WOMEN'S GROUP

A Black and Ethnic Minority Older Women's Planning Group has developed following the success of OWP's conference for Black and Ethnic older women.

About eight women have formed a group to discuss and plan future events for Black and Ethnic older women, and representatives from the group will be elected to become members of the Older Women's Project Working Group, who work with the staff team and plan and monitor all the Project's activities.

Evelyn Nero

PAST IT

a poem by Pat Jennings

Sex at sixty
is it a sin?

Do you still get the urge
the wish to merge?

Is it done
Do you still want fun.

Will those grey streaks
in your hair
get you there,
Or will you be seen
as obscene?

While the young expend energy
on quantity,
The 'old' relax
seek quality.

Age adds a new dimension
to the meaning
of suspension.

It is thought unwise
to air one's views
on sex at sixty
when everyone knows
you're past it.

LESBIAN LITERATURE . LESBIAN HISTORY

Information about resources and courses.

By Margaret Brennan - Women's Education Worker, South Greenwich Adult Education Institute.

Since September 1990 South Greenwich Adult Education Institute have been providing lesbian courses at the Greenwich Lesbian and Gay Centre in Woolwich. The lesbian history course this term has attracted a very enthusiastic group who hope to continue meeting and learning together.

In September 1991 we are offering LESBIAN LITERATURE for the first time. This will be an informal class where students can discuss their responses to a variety of texts which will be negotiated between students and tutor at the first session on Wednesday 18th September.

Discover that there was lesbian literature before The Well of Loneliness! Read between the lines in those schoolgirl stories you loved! No previous knowledge of literature is required. If you like reading and want to explore literature by and about lesbians then here is your chance.

The course lasts for 12 weeks, 7-9pm on Wednesdays at Eltham Hill School, Eltham London SE9.

Lesbian writing and publishing is a growth area encompassing a variety of forms and genres - all kinds of non-fiction, romance, science fiction, detective novels, short stories, autobiography, poetry, drama, humour, etc...

It's difficult to provide a booklist because of the huge range of literature available to us (hooray!) but some stories focussing on the lives of older lesbians are:

Cactus	Anna Wilson
Magdalen	Sarah Aldridge
Prism	Valerie Taylor
Sister Gin	June Arnold
The Threshing Floor	Barbara Burford
Saturday Night in	
the Prime of Life	Dodici Azpadu
On Strike Against God	Joanna Russ
The Cancer Journals	Audre Lorde
The Hide and Seek Files	Caeia March

Who were the lesbians in history - the famous and the infamous and the not at all famous? Discover our heritage as lesbians - romantic friends, cross dressers, your favourite teacher at school, in your family closet! What does this contribute to our understanding of ourselves individually and collectively?

Explore these and other issues on the 12 week LESBIAN HISTORY course beginning on Wednesday January 8th 1992 at Eltham School, Eltham Hill, London SE9 7-9pm. No previous knowledge of history or lesbian history is required and students and tutor plan the programme together.

From Black Lesbian
Compiled by J.R. S. Brown
Published by Black Press Ltd
1991

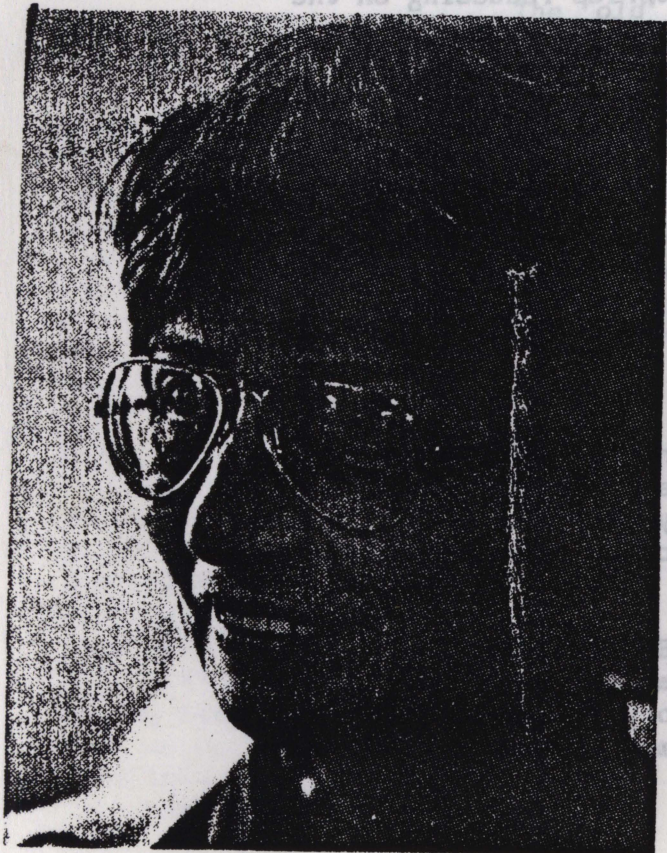
A few general books to whet the appetite are:

Surpassing the Love of Men	Lillian Faderman
Scotch Verdict	Lillian Faderman
Not a Passing Phase For	London Lesbian History Group, lesbian history
Those Who Would Be sisters	class Birkbeck College
Dear Girl: Letters and Diaries	
of Two Working Women	ed. T. Thompson
Another Mother Tongue :	
gay words, gay worlds	Judy Grahn
The Spinster and Her Enemies	Sheila Jeffries
Before Stonewall	Weiss and Schiller
Sappho Was A Right On Woman	Abbott and Love

An ASSERTION COURSE for lesbians will take place at Greenwich Park Branch of Thameside Institute, Royal Hill SE10 beginning Thursday 30th April for 10 weeks.

FOR FURTHER INFO ON THE ABOVE COURSES, OR OTHER COURSES, PHONE MARGARET BRENNAN ON 081-856-1230.

JUNE ARNOLD - author of Sister Gin, and others.
(pic from Lesbian Muse 1990)



Lesbian Black women in our history



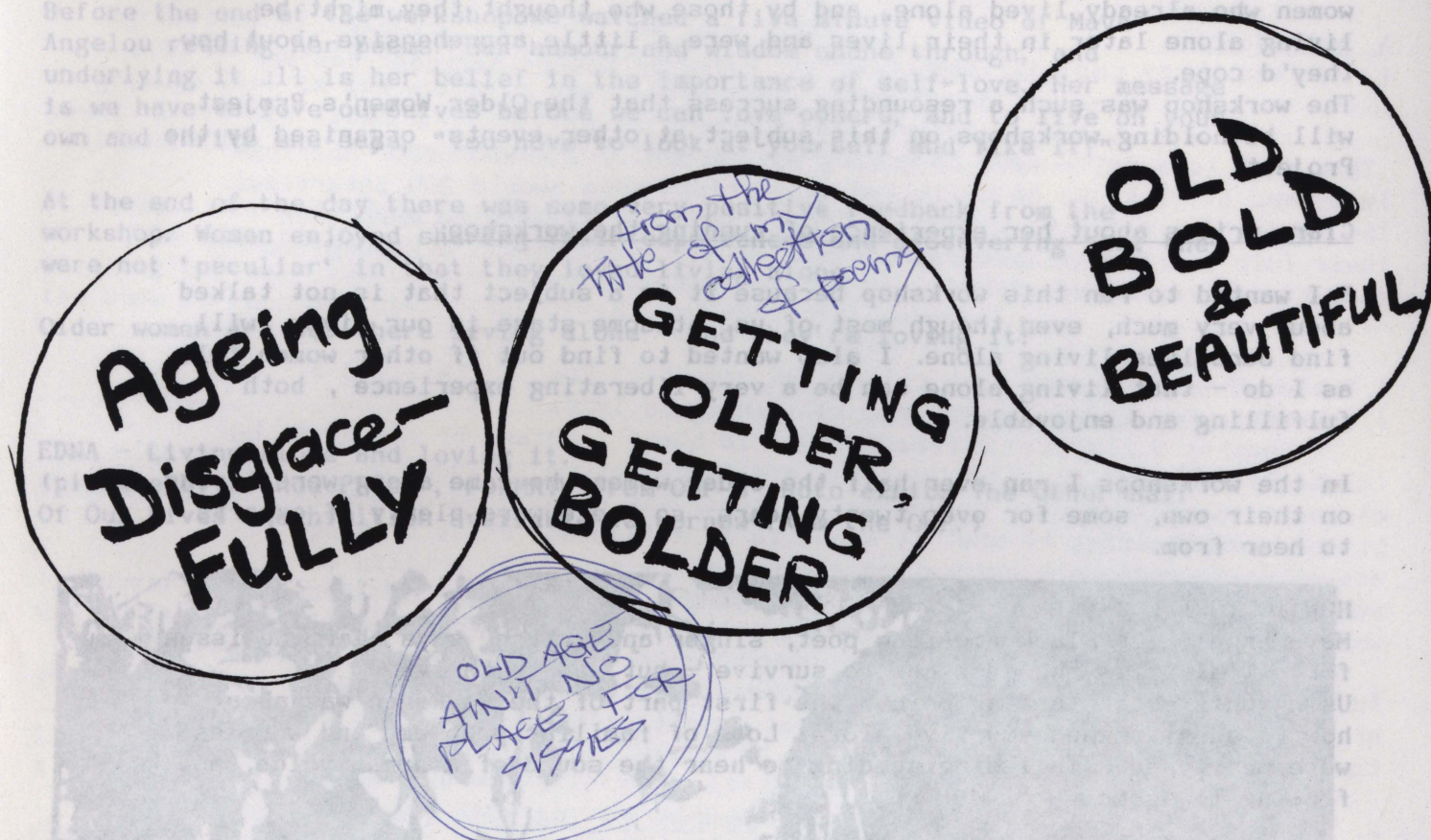
Mary Fields (1832?-1914)
Pioneer of the Old West

From: Black Lesbians.
Compiled by J R Roberts
Published by Naiad Press. USA
1981

BADGES BY JO.

The Older Women's Project wants to produce some badges that older women - and those who work with them - will want to wear.

Here are some suggestions - just slogans - art work will be included later!



From the '60's many groups discriminated against by society began claiming back the words that were being used against them. For instance, Lesbians took on the word "dyke" to use in a celebratory way; black people proclaimed their racial identity with pride e.g. "Black and Beautiful".

Lots of words that refer to being older are used as insults. Older women are targets of both sexism and ageism. The roots of such insults as "old hag" are deep, and stem from ignorance and the fear of the power of older women. A badge is a way to challenge the unthought out attitudes of others, and to 'reclaim' the positive power of words.

Tell us what you'd like to see on a badge. We'll make a range from your suggestions, and publish them in our next newsletter.

Jo Stanley.

LIVING ALONE AND LOVING IT

Earlier this year Clare Mundy, an Advice Centre Manager who herself lives alone (and loves it!) ran a workshop with older women in Walthamstow on their feelings about living alone. The workshop was packed out, both by women who already lived alone, and by those who thought they might be living alone later in their lives and were a little apprehensive about how they'd cope.

The workshop was such a resounding success that the Older Women's Project will be holding workshops on this subject at other events organised by the Project.

Clare writes about her experience of running the workshop:

" I wanted to run this workshop because it is a subject that is not talked about very much, even though most of us, at some stage in our lives, will find ourselves living alone. I also wanted to find out if other women felt as I do - that living alone can be a very liberating experience , both fulfilling and enjoyable.

In the workshops I ran over half the older women who came along were living on their own, some for over twenty years, so there were plenty of experts to hear from.

HOW TO THRIVE

Maya Angelou, a Black American poet, singer and writer, says that the issue for all of us is not just how to survive - but how to thrive.

Using this as a starting point, the first part of the workshop was about how to survive when you live alone. Lots of familiar problems and worries were mentioned - including needing to hear the sound of a human voice, and feeling lonesome.

The older women taking part in the workshop made useful, interesting and sometimes funny suggestions about dealing with these problems. For example, it became quite clear that talking to yourself is a common way to thrive when living alone. For instance one woman said, "I have a go at the T.V. sometimes, especially those silly chat programmes. I'm arguing away at it!"

When it came to feeling lonesome one woman came straight to the point: "I've felt lonely in the midst of my family." There was general agreement that being alone is not the same thing as being lonely.

The second part of the workshop was all about the positive aspects of being alone. It was very encouraging to hear about the many ways that older women enjoy themselves when they are alone. Being in charge, doing exactly what you please, being a Very Important Person who gets her own way! Just a few of the things women said about this were: "I love getting dirty with my gardening, then having a bath and wandering about in my dressing gown." "I just jump on a bus and see where it goes. I've been all over London like that, for free." "I get my paints out and start painting a picture, and the hours just fly past." "I sit on the floor a lot, with my knitting. You'd think I didn't have any furniture."

From Black Lesbians
Compiled by J.R. Roberts
Published by Naiad Press, USA
1991

Whether it's an afternoon with your library book, visiting craft markets, writing your own poems, whatever, a secret life is something that can be enjoyed just for you, without any help from anyone. Finding what you want for yourself can take time, but as one woman put it, "It's the same as working at a marriage, you have to work at being on your own. It's up to you."

Before the end of the workshop we watched a five minute video of Maya Angelou reading her poems. Her humour and wisdom shone through, and underlying it all is her belief in the importance of self-love. Her message is we have to love ourselves before we can love others, and to live on your own and thrive she says, "You have to look at yourself and like it!"

At the end of the day there was some very positive feedback from the workshop. Women enjoyed sharing their experiences and discovering that they were not 'peculiar' in that they loved living alone.

Older women are out there living alone - and they're loving it!

EDNA - Living alone and loving it.

(picture by Brenda Price, FORMAT, from OWP's photo exhib: 'The Other Half Of Our Lives - exhibition available to borrow from the OWP.)



Older Lesbian Booklist

(compiled by Sheila Williams)

The books below are mainly in the Older Women's Project collection, or books we know about. The list isn't very long, and it's mainly American. That reflects the attitudes of publishers towards older lesbians; it's not a reflection of the significance of older lesbians.

You may like to order some of these books from your local library, so that other people too can see that there ARE some books about/by older lesbians.

A. NON-FICTION.

1. Adelman, Marcy, Ed. Long Time Passing: Lives of Older Lesbians, Boston, 1986.

This book is a collective biography of a score of unknown older American lesbians. It is based on solicited manuscripts and about 200 interviews. The subjects are black, white; well-off, poor; lucky or with more than their fair share of disasters; healthy, dying; they include occupations of many kinds: athletes, doctors - and married women.

1. Boston Women's Health Book Collective, (British Eds. A. Phillips & J. Rakusen): Our Bodies Ourselves, 1971 (Penguin 1978).

Chapter 5 "Lesbian perspectives", is about lesbians of all ages, but is wholly relevant to older lesbians and is therefore included here; also at least one author grew up in the 'fifties. The chapter is a contribution to the understanding of what it means to be a lesbian. First drawing attention to society's assumption - can't get a man - the article moves to consider isolation; appearance and "fancying"; lesbian mothers; lesbians and therapy; what we do in bed; sex; a political statement; bisexuality.

The conclusions are that you cannot separate oppression as lesbians from oppression as women; that a class analysis is needed, as is a separate organization for lesbians. But the most important thing of all is to work together as women.

2. Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich: Look Me In The Eye, Women's Press, London, 1983.

This book is a collection of essays and reviews. The authors, 65+ and 50+, make it clear they are a lesbian couple, and the theme recurs throughout. But the main emphasis is on being any older woman in a hostile world, which shows neither respect nor understanding, and also makes her invisible. Men naturally do not usually support, but nor do younger women in the Women's Movement. "An Open Letter to the Women's Movement" is a memorable essay on this theme.

On action, the authors point out that since there are going to be so many old women, so men old and young had better pull together quickly or there will be a Grandma's Homes industry with men taking the decisions, old women suffering them, and young women doing the cleaning, cooking and serving.

3. May Sarton, Journal of a Solitude. The Women's Press, London, 1985.

May Sarton sets up a network in which loved friends (who sometimes die), the flowers and fruits of the seasons (which progress to winter), writers intimately known through their work (of whom the best-loved are bisexual Bloomsbury), and above all the hard work of the house and field - all help to see her through a depression in which however she continues.

4. May Sarton, At Seventy. Norton, New York, 1984.

This is a difficult book to describe. It is the journal of the pilgrimage that is the author's seventieth year. What doesn't happen in a year? There are flowers, trees, rain; friends, books; lecture tours, holidays. The author has an eye for life in the shadow of eternity.

5. Toklas, Alice B. What is Remembering, San Francisco. 1985.

This is a biography of the American writer Gertrude Stein, by her lifelong partner. The couple lived mainly abroad, especially in Paris, and the book is full of interesting social and anecdotal material.

B. PAMPLETS OF LESBIAN INTEREST.

1. Cooper, Baba: Ageism in the Lesbian Community. Crossing Pamphlet, California, undated, not before 1983.

This is an analytical account of self-defeating discrimination by younger lesbian women against lesbian women over 60.

2. London Older Lesbians' Conference, March 24, 1984.

A Report of this Conference was printed in London Friend, 1984.

The official report, for general consumption, consists of comprehensive recommendations, a history of the genesis of the Conference, and an account of the workshops.

3. London Older Lesbians' Conference, March 24, 1984.

The internal Report is an account of older lesbian life today, using headings like Images of Ourselves, Lesbian Parenting, Sexuality and Ageism, Housing, Older Lesbians and the Liberation Movement, Health. Its circulation was to participants.

4. Older People and Sexuality, a Statement by Lesbian Workers within Pensioners' Link, 1990.

This pamphlet opens with a statement of demands and the right to sexuality and privacy of older people, especially in residential homes, and the right to respect if openly Lesbian or gay.

Older Lesbian Booklist

(compiled by Sheila Williams)

C. FICTION WITH A LESBIAN THEME OR LESBIAN AUTHOR.

1. Arnold, June, Sister Gin, The Women's Press, London, 1979.

Sister Gin is a novel which, within comic portraits of women, thinks that old age manages best. The middle-aged women are crazy, funny, and disorganized; the old are crazy, funny, but organized. And together they are stronger than a would-be rapist, whom they strip, tie-up, and leave to be found. Like Prism (see below) this novel strongly denies society's view of old women.

2. More, Meredith, October Passion, Naiad, Florida, undated.

A novel about two women who find fulfilling relationships after they are 60.

3. Muller, Ann, Parents Matter, Florida 1987?

A novel of the relationships between young gay and lesbian people, often wanting to come out, and attempts to forge understanding between the generations.

4. Nones, Elizabeth, A Room Full of Women, Naiad, Florida, 1987.

This is not an exclusively lesbian novel, rather, lesbian women hold an established place among other women.

5. Sarton, May, As We Are Now, The Women's Press, London, 1983.

This is the tale of a retired teacher, placed by her brother in a Home where she is disgracefully persecuted by the caretakers to make her - Sarton's basic theme - cease to be an individual who likes literature, music and being herself. There are entr'actes of loving people too. It would be a pity to give away the ending.

6. Taylor, Valerie, Prism, Tallahassee, Naiad, Florida, 1981.

Prism concerns Anne, a woman of 65 just retiring, and therefore with little money now. Nevertheless she manages to win on all counts: finds a flat within her income; gets a part-time job; finds a woman she loves.

D. POEMS

- Sarton, May, The Silence Now, New York, 1988.

These are poems about older women by a lesbian author.

This list is very far from exhaustive. The Older Women's Project welcomes your comments and suggestions on books we could add to make this fuller. Bookshops where you can get some of these books include:

- # Silver Moon, 68 Charing Cross Road, WC2. TEL: 071 836 7906.
- # Sisterwrite, 190 Upper street, NI. TEL: 071 493 1857.
- # Gay's the Word, 66 Marchmont Street, WC1. TEL: 071 278 7654
- # Compendium (for American imports), 234 Camden High Street, NW1. TEL: 071 485 8944.
- # West and Wilde, who mail out lists of lesbian interest books several times a year.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES?

by Zelda Curtis

"No more Plato or Goethe on the rates" screamed the headline of a newspaper article examining the recent Government White Paper on adult education. In line with other Thatcherite inheritances, this Paper concentrates on making education pay for itself. If it doesn't pay, then you won't get it!

Some cut-happy local councillors are rubbing their hands with glee, but if this White Paper becomes law there will be serious consequences for older women, great numbers of whom participate regularly in continuing education. Fees for Adult Education may rise three-fold. Only those courses that are job-related will be financed centrally if the government proposals become law.

Study carefully the Government's paper "Education and Training for the 21st Century - Access and Opportunities" and you will find they have completely ignored older women's needs. We don't even rate a mention!

Many women, therefore, have been writing to the DES commenting on this omission and asking where are their opportunities and their access to learning? Older women want to catch up and keep up with all the new kinds of knowledge available now. They want to develop new skills as well as brush up on those they already have. And many of them also want the 'leisure' classes, the craft classes, exercise classes etc., that are already suffering cutbacks.

Older women are concerned that with these cutbacks and the higher cost of some educational and leisure facilities, especially cross-borough ones, more and more they will be forced out of a life-enhancing process which counters isolation and loneliness as well as keeping them mentally and physically active and healthy.

Continuing education enables older women to play an even greater and more productive role in the community - and that can't be bad! So, let's make certain the DES is made aware of it. We want affordable, appropriate educational activities, in buildings accessible to older women with disabilities, and catering for the needs of older women from differing cultures and class backgrounds. And if we want Plato and Goethe - then the opportunity should be there!

COME ON - JOIN IN.

Thanks very much to the women who wrote to us in response to the plea in the last newsletter for your input. But there are hundreds of women on the mailing list. We'd like to know who you are and what you want from the newsletter and the Older Women's Project. What do you think? Who are you? What groups are you in? Do you show this newsletter to other older women? Write and let us know - confidentially if you like. Send us your poems, send us copies of any protests letters you write to local papers, send us anything that shows the strong and varied voices of older women.

CAMPAIGNING HARD AND LONG - AND HAPPILY?

Have you, and other older women you know, been involved in any campaigns or struggles to improve the worlds you live in? It doesn't matter whether it's a local demo to get a new Zebra crossing or a major international delegation to save whales. The point is, we'd like to know what you've been fighting for, so that memories of women's resistance to not get lost.

A BOOK AND WORKSHOP.

One of our plans for 1992 is to create a home-made illustrated scrapbook of women's history of resistance. It's in conjunction with a banner and poster making workshop we're also hoping to run.

PICTURES.

The idea is that we'll have pictures (of banners you've sewn, posters you've painted, photos of demos you've been on) and writing.

WRITING.

The writing may be in the form of poems; a photocopied diary; a newspaper articles about your action; a fiction story about an older woman who did something resistant - or dreamt about it; a playlet; your dream of the future. In short, we want whatever version of the record of resistance that you choose to send us.

NOW! Please start now, so we can build and plan towards creating a lovely celebration of all the causes- victorious or not - you've put efforts into.

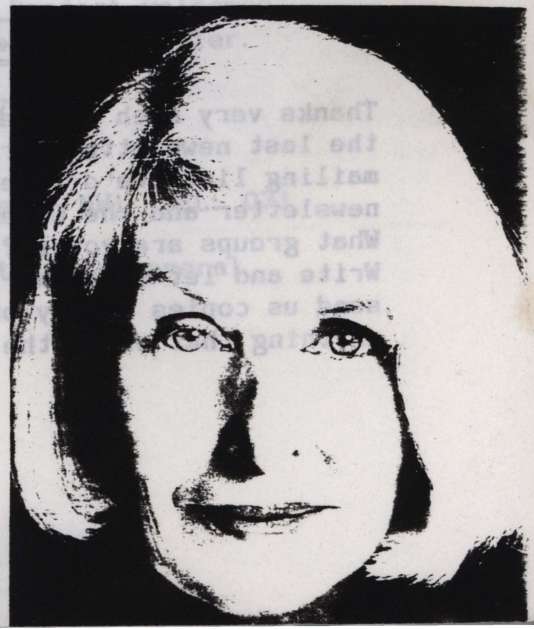
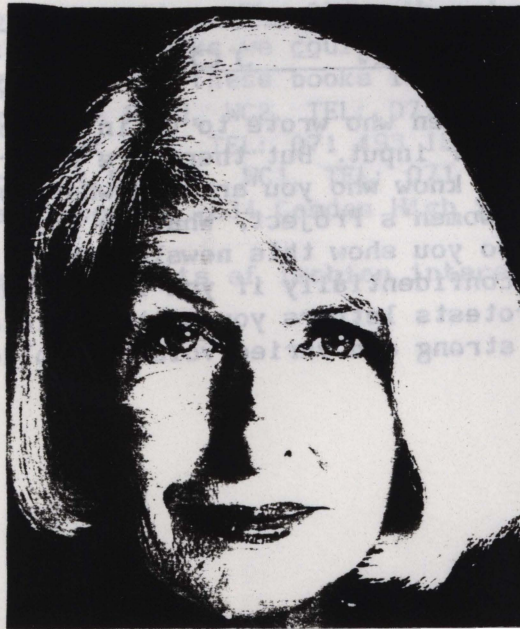
DENYING THE WRINKLES.

JULY was notable for the ageist notions surrounding the latest big hype: the introduction to Britain of (yet another) product that claims to counter the effects of ageing. Retin-A can help you deny you are as old as you are, they say. They also said the same thing about Monkey glands, years ago. Maybe you've tried several products yourself, or dismissed them as a load of rubbish, or longed for them but not been able to afford them.

The Sunday Times produced a re-touched photo of 1950s model Jennifer Hocking, age 61, to show how smooth-skinned she might have looked if only she'd use Retin A. The assumption was 100 per cent complete: you want to look younger than you are.

And who is all this marketing targetted at? Why, women, that half of the human race who are endlessly urged to make themselves look youthful, though we're not quiet sure why.

And why is ageing such a terrible thing? Why are wrinkles are crime/tragedy? Is it because men fear women less if they are (containable) pretty dollies and not whole human beings? Is it because people are so terrified of death, and ageing is a sign of death's inevitability? Is it just another way to make money, by playing on peoples' anxieties and vanities?



WISDOM ON AGEING

*"We become fascinated by the exercise of power.....
Wisdom is considered of no importance"*

The Stepney Star recently looked at ageing from the perspective of several people in the Stepney area and concluded that new attitudes and policies are needed to reduce discrimination against older people, and that older people are a vital force in Church life.

According to a recent report from The Church of England's Board for Social Responsibility, called 'Ageing', is said by the Star to be a comprehensive survey of ageing in contemporary British Society, and is the first report published by the Church of England on the topic. It is accompanied by a study guide, "Happy Birthday Anyway" which includes discussion of the ageing process, theological and biblical reflection, the contribution and needs of older people, social issues related to housing and health, and the place of older people in the life of the Church.

'Ageing' costs £5.95 (75p p&p), and 'Happy Birthday Anyway' costs £1.95 (40p p&p). Both documents available from bookshops or by post from Church House Bookshop, 31, Great Smith Street, London SW1 3NB

by Evelyn Nero

JO STANLEY reports on the 2nd Women's Studies Network conference (6-7 July 1991)

If you were wondering where the women from the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 70s now meet, now that they are in their 40s and 50s, usually, an answer is "At the Women's Studies Conferences".

The Older Women's Project was there, with a stall, leaflets and posters. Women from all over Britain and Europe came up and took away leaflets, often wondering why there was nothing like the OWP in their area. Their names have gone on our mailing list - so any views you care to express through this newsletter will have a wide circulation.

This year, the venue for the Women's Studies Network conference was Camden Girls School. Around 500 women - some of them older, like poet Astra and Shadow Minister of Women, Jo Richardson - gathered for two days of lectures, seminars, entertainment and discussion.

Unfortunately, it wasn't as good as it sounds. Many feminists believe that as publishers and universities have taken UP a recognition of women's interests, so they have watered down, and taken OVER those interests. The Women's Liberation Movement has been co-opted and reduced into something that is just another subject to be studied on the curriculum.

This may be an extreme view, overly pessimistic. But one outcome of this annexation is that many of the sessions at the conferences would have been over the head of most women interested in women's studies, and anyone just starting out on being students of the topic. To this criticism, the organisers say that it is the only chance in the year when women's studies lecturers can talk to each other. But why aren't they talking in a language that most women can understand? It would be a particularly excluding conference for older women who had not had the benefit of studying post-structuralism and post-modernism in 1980s academe.

And yet what fascinating topics were covered, from Women in Developing Countries, to History, to Counselling, to Publishing. Women's Studies is clearly something that has much to offer women of all ages, providing it is

CAMPAIGNING HARD AND LONG - AND HAPPILY?

taught in ways that take into account that most older women have been excluded from higher education earlier in life, how ever wise and knowledgeable they may have become through their high-cost courses in those "Universities of Life".

The OWP has copies of the conference programme and some materials from it in the office, if you would like to see them. Any women wishing to join the Women's Studies (UK) network should contact Pauline Brier, WYCROW, University of Bradford, Bradford BD7 1DP, West Yorkshire.

To get a copy of the 1991-92 listings of all women's studies courses and courses dealing with gender issues should contact Jackie Stacey, Centre for Women's Studies/Dept of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA 1 4YL.

DICKENSIAN?

A new show at the Hampstead Theatre, by Miriam Margher, highlights the attitudes to women of this man whose books are found on so many people's shelves.

What are the role models for older women, eh?

Miss Havisham languishing, yellow and bitter, for the love of a man; Miss Wade?

Can anyone remind newsletter readers of some inspiring role models in Classic fiction - either in Dickens or elsewhere.

What qualities would you like to see in fictional older women? Highway women? High Court Judges? *space travellers, detectives, fire fighters, sculptors*

(see my poem, "penalty")
Booktoken to best response list of qualities.

by Jo Stanley

COMMUNITY SUMMER FESTIVAL IN ISLINGTON

Marona Bogle is an outreach and development worker with older people at the The Fire Station, 84, Mayton Street, London N7 6QT. She wants to let newsletter readers know about a Community Summer Festival to be held at the old Fire Station on Saturday August 31st from 12-6pm. All are welcome to attend.

For information about daytime classes held at the Fire Station Community Centre, which include yoga, keep-fit and language classes, contact Marona on 071-607-9794.

YOUR LETTERSWhat can you lose?

Dear OWP ,

Can I say first of all that to me, age is a state of mind.

I don't call myself disabled, but able to do some things and unable to do others.

I write poetry - on any subject!

I talk to schoolchildren at their schools - about childhood , about war , about games etc.

I am always urging other people, especially women, to try their skills - some don't know they've got them 'til they try.

What can we lose?

Best wishes, H. L. SMITH.

(Bow)

Hullo OWP Team,

Many thanks for the last newsletter. Always look forward to reading it.

This latest one was particularly interesting.

Regarding ageism, I'd say, don't put yourself down, regard yourself with dignity spiced with humour. Guess we have to be called something, although labels of any sort (when applied to people) are way off the mark and only tell a little bit about anyone. Keep your individuality as much as possible. I prefer 'senior', it's short and to the point.

Definitely agree, as I get older I get bolder, fits a lot of us today.

Campaigning skills, Information and Techniques - sounds a good idea.

Learning new skills or brushing up old is always a good idea.

Long live Pensioners Link, it certainly has encouraged me in a lot of ways.

Off now to brush up my dancing skills, or more likely lack of them! Who cares, it's good fun.

Sincerely, H. H. (Woodford Green).

SCENE AND HEARD ?

Juliet Margetts from Polari Productions is interested in talking to:

Lesbians over forty - were you out on the scene in the fifties and sixties?

Tell us about the bars, cafes and clubs you went to. Did you like them or hate them? We are making a programme for Channel 4 on the social scene in and around London between 1940's and 1970's.

I'm sure you have some interesting stories to tell and I'd like to hear them. If you have any information at all please contact me. All information will be treated in strictest confidence.

I look forward to your call.

Juliet Margetts 081-985-0425.

SAVE THE BUS PASS

Dear Readers,

I am asking you to join us in our fight to save our bus pass.

The threat of losing our pass has been hanging over us a long time.

Without our pass it would be impossible for us to get about. It would be impossible for us to pay fares from the small pensions we are given.

This is a pensioner's cry for action. I am appealing to readers to keep up to date on what's happening about bus passes, to join pensioners organisations in supporting the fight to keep our bus passes.

Sincerely, J Bartley.

Dear OWP Team,

I loved the strong faces of the women pictured in the last OWP newsletter - Harriet Tubman; Mary Seacole; Yaa Asntewa - all wonderful women.

I am 70 years old and am not worried whether I'm called old or elderly - it's the way people say it that matters.

P. Maione. (London W6)

SECOND THOUGHTS

Old means antique
to discerning people.

Valuable, rare, exquisite
being bid for.

Sometimes beyond price.
Which affects the way
some people think of and use
the word antique.

by Pat Jennings.

Strong-faced women - 'wonderful'



Two black American older lesbians - (left) Mabel Hampton, who has contributed to the New York lesbian archive. And (right) Edmonia Lewis (1843? - 1907?), a sculptor.
From: Black lesbians by J.R. Roberts.

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Groups / Information for Older Lesbians

Proud Old Lesbians

(age 50+) c/o Pensioners Link, 33, Dalston Lane, ^{London} E8. Tel: 071-241-2224

Older Lesbians Network BM/OLN, London WC1N 3XX. Tel: 071-639-4204

Rock October Trust (Housing needs for older lesbians)

c/o BM/OLN, London WC1 3XX

Older Lesbian Group (age 40+), c/o Greenwich Lesbian and Gay Centre, 3rd Floor, 17, Bowater Road, ^{London} SE18 5TF. Tel: 081-316-5954

London Lesbian and Gay Centre, 69, Cowcross St., ^{London} EC1. Tel: 071-608-1471

Black Lesbian and Gay Centre, BM Box 4390, London WC1 3XX.

Lesbian Line, BM Box 1515, ^{London} WC1N 3XX. Tel: 071-251-6911.

GEMMA (national group for lesbians with/out disabilities). BM Box 5700, ^{London} WC1 3XX

Camden Lesbian and Gay Centre and Black Lesbians Group, (also mature lesbians group), 54-56, Phoenix Road, London NW1. Tel: 071-251-6911

Brothers and Sisters Gay Deaf Group, c/o 109, Kessock Close, Ferry Lane Estate, ~~Tottenham~~ London N17 9PW

Jewish Gay and Lesbian Group, BM Box JGG, London WC1N 3XX.

Irish Lesbian Group, c/o The Irish Women's Centre, 59, Stoke Newington Church Street, London N16

SHAKTI (South East Asian Lesbian and Gay Network), c/o London Friend, 86, Caledonian Road, London N1. Tel: 071-837-2782 (night tel no: 081-993-9001)

Chinese Lesbian Group, Box 47, c/o Sisterwrite, 190 Upper Street, London N1

Getting more information:

Try: Local Women's Centres ^(not many left)
Women's Units
Pensioners Link
Age Concern
Libraries

Notice Boards in Women's Bookshops etc
Local Community Centres

Two black American older lesbians - (left) Mabel Hampton, who has contributed to the New York lesbian archive. And (right) Edmonia Lewis (1863? - 1907?), a sculptor from: Black lesbians by J.E. Roberts