



# At Home with Old Lesbians in Rhode Island



A Photo Album in  
Progress - 2020

Mev Miller

At Home  
with  
Old Lesbians  
in  
Rhode Island:  
A Photo Album in Progress

Photographs by  
Mev Miller

October 2020

## **At Home with Old Lesbians in Rhode Island: A Photo Album in Progress**

Photographs and Book Design by Mev Miller

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Photographer Exceptions:

- Photo of Dorothy and Bea taken by *Jack's Galore Rescue, Washington, MA*
- Photo of Mev & Nancy taken by Thea Ernest

Words and Descriptions for participants were selected or written by the individuals.

Photos taken with a Canon PowerShot SX60 HS

Book Layout Designed in QuarkXPress 2018

Front Cover Design by Mev Miller

*Why the Labrys Outline?* The labrys emerged in the 1970s as a symbol for Lesbian and feminist strength and self-sufficiency. "... this ancient farming tool and weapon, with its origins in ancient Minoan and Amazonian culture, symbolised not only a matriarchal past and womyn centered vision of the future, but also the creative/destructive force/ability of feminists (the force of womyn) that can cut through webs of patriarchal lies, illusions and reversals that block the breakthrough to new imaginations, visions and forms of being in the world, in short, the tools of feminist empowerment." — <http://findinglesbians.blogspot.com/2013/08/labrys-tool-of-lesbian-feminism.html>. — Downloaded October, 2020.

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## Introduction

I like to take photographs but I have no formal training as a photographer. This is a hobby that I find relaxing and supports my creativity. I've also learned that, when I walk anywhere with my camera, I tend to slow down and see things differently – or perhaps more clearly and deeply. I look more intently at my surroundings. Generally, I take pictures of places – usually in nature. I sometimes have to remember to take pictures of people, especially when traveling because I get so enthralled with my surroundings.

In the beginning of the year 2020, our OLOC Chapter in Rhode Island (Old Lesbian Organizing for Change) had been gaining momentum. We welcomed new members and we decided to work on a project to Get Out the Vote. We had become aware that many LGBTQ individuals were not registered to vote, but that once registered, we were more likely to vote. Chapter members received training on how to register voters in RI. We also wanted to reach out to disenfranchised communities whose vote can sometimes be discouraged or challenged.

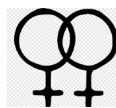
Then, in March, COVID raged through the Northeast and we were “shut down.” All of us being in the vulnerable category returned to our homes to stay sequestered and safe. We learned how to use Zoom and met regularly to stay connected, check-in on each other, share stories and resources, and remain true to our activism in the ways we could under the circumstances.

In May, I had been looking at various publications and came across an article called the “Front Porch Project.” A photographer had been driving around in her community and took pictures of families (mostly wearing masks) who used posters to communicate what they wanted to say about the COVID pandemic. The pictures and stories moved me. As June Pride month approached, I began to think about how I could use my camera to make visible the many Old Lesbians in Rhode Island who, even in the best of times, can be ignored or remain non-visible.

When the Governor of RI relaxed some travel restrictions, I put the word out through our OLOC network and members' friends that I would be willing to travel to their home to take their Front Porch picture. I suggested Lesbians could hold signs or wear whatever they wanted to convey their personalities. I expanded the location of the photos to include their outdoor environment rather than only their porches (especially for those who don't have porches). Wearing my mask and using my long-range camera, I was able to take these photographs of Old Lesbians – willing to be out and share their lives – while maintaining proper social distancing. Some participants are active members of OLOC, others are friends or supporters.

This first edition of *At Home with Old Lesbians in Rhode Island* is being made available to correspond with National Coming Out Day – October 11, 2020. I'd love to add to the album – and hope that other Old Lesbians in Rhode Island will contact me to participate. While this first collection includes a range of some diversities – age, cities/towns, income/class, job/professional experiences, relationships, coming-out experiences, spiritualities, activities and activism – I look forward to adding more diversities, pictures, and stories.

Old Lesbians are members of many communities. This project aims to bring voice and visibility to a fuller range of our lives and experiences. This project allows me enjoy my photography hobby in a different and purposeful way. — *Mev Miller, October 2020*







## **Marge (1932) and Cathy (1946)**

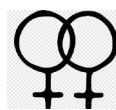
We are happily together now for 44 years enjoying every day. Committed social workers, and long-time feminist and LGBT activists, we share many common interests such as sailing on Narraganset Bay, visiting the Berkshires for music, theater and dance, and occasional travels. Now we are enjoying our home, PBS programs, reading lots of books, and back yard visits with best friends and neighbors.





## Joan (1946) with Bailey

“Live, Love, Laugh.” I like this quote so much I had it tattooed on my upper right arm. What do I like about being an older Lesbian? Perhaps it's that I am finally coming out. The support and friendships I have made by being an OLOC member has helped me to be my true self. My passions include: Activism with my church, cooking for people, being near the water, and artistic endeavors such as painting, carving, furniture making, metalsmithing. I'm grateful for the companionship of Bailey during this time of COVID.





## Betty (1947) and Tricia (1958)

We've been growing old together since 2002. Enjoying cycling, birding, kayaking, walking while traveling together. We believe "You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream."

Betty's been involved in cycling advocacy and activism for years. " You are just a bike ride away from a good mood."

Tricia enjoys container gardening, birding, cycling and singing. Four-part acapella in the barbershop style keeps her busy, and she challenges herself by singing in competitive quartets and choruses. "Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and life to everything."

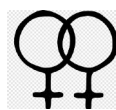
Belonging to OLOC has provided engagement with new friends in the lesbian community in RI. Hurray!!





## Mariellen (1943) and Elda (1944)

Thirty years, seven grandkids, travels to faraway places, glorious gardens, five books, and the support of a wonderful Lesbian network, we still persist. Age and Covid may have limited us in some ways, but we cherish the time we have to slow down and experience the change of seasons in a much more intimate way than we would have done otherwise. And still we laugh...







**Marie (1936) and Candy (1946)**

“Old but not finished...”



## Bea (1952) and Dorothy (1947)

*with Trix (adopted in 2019)*

### Stillness

we women, it seems  
really don't understand  
ourselves  
or one another.

or perhaps we just  
focus too much energy  
into interesting complexities  
and habitual worry

but we should keep in mind:  
a nervous woman can relax  
in yielding to touch,  
a gentle stroke up tensing thighs

a chattering woman  
sometimes needs a kiss  
to halt onrushing attachment,  
concern and words

sometimes a woman  
wants to simply feel  
letting you touch is a gift  
deserving praise

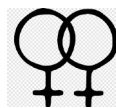
a special thing  
beyond all need  
to touch  
back

— from *PATCHWORK, A Memoir in Poetry*,  
by Dorothy. 2019.

Available from Amazon, ISBN 9781092379243



Photo by Jack's Galore Rescue, Washington, MA.





## Dee (1951) and Sally (1950)

Our favourite quote is "To the future....yes!" (Dag Hammarskjöld)

It is engraved on the inside of our rings and was a central theme of our commitment ceremony in 1998. It has been important throughout our lives together - 24 years. This sentiment covers just about all the elements of our passions and activities.





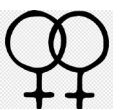


## **Nadine (1958) and Terry (1949)**

A quote we like, "take some time to smell the flowers, life is good."

Projects around the garden have really helped us during these crazy times. Nadine loves to refinish furniture and Terry has gotten back into painting.

We are both happily retired.







## Kris (1957) and Jules (1950)

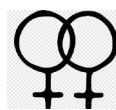
Jules and Kris live in Riverside at the bucolic Ozzy Park. Kris is a Master Carpenter and Art Handler, working for the RISD Museum and equally proud of all the beautiful work she has accomplished over the years on homes in and around Providence and our own house in the dell. Kris has filled the house with her gorgeous mosaic art and the garden designs that surround us. Our pride and joy are the two 4-year-old Cardigan Corgis that live with us. Jules plies her art here at home and in the studio in Pawtucket. The yard and house are filled with prints and paintings of Jules' designs.





## Thea (1954)

Mev always gets me laughing until my eyes nearly close! It was fun to have a photo shoot with her at my new home. Something that I like about being an old Lesbian is remembering being a baby dyke, but now living with a longer view and a lot more peace. Being myself with family, my contractors and my new neighbors was my activism during the past year. I want them to know what my life is like, how we are similar and how we are different. My activism includes asking questions of others that open their lives to me. Keep the conversation going! During these isolating times, painting outdoors is my comfort. And, despite physical distance, I use the phone and Internet more to meet new people and let those in my life know that our connection is essential to me.







**Deb (1952) and Susan (1958) with Jack**

With hopes for a peaceful future!





## Jodi (1953) and Ruthie (1958) with Coco



### Jodi

"Time and love."

- *Laura Nyro*

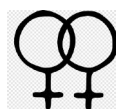
Being an Old Lesbian means I tried — and keep trying. My activism includes being me and working against xenophobia. I spend my days appreciating music, loving dogs, working to make change, and learning. My family helps me to get through the days — and Rachel Maddow too!

### Ruthie

"Well behaved women do not make history."

- *Mae West*

I feel good knowing that - as an Old Lesbian - I have been a part of what helps to make growing up now somewhat easier. My activism is living as an out Lesbian. I enjoy reading, gardening, trying new foods, and appreciating nature. British comedy, my family and friends help me to get through these difficult days.







## Kate (1944)

My heart is moved by all I cannot save:  
so much has been destroyed  
I have to cast my lot with those  
who age after age, perversely,  
with no extraordinary power,  
reconstitute the world.

— Adrienne Rich, *Dreams of a Common Language*

I thought I was a new Lesbian because I only realized my Lesbian self when I was 50. When I joined OLOC and found out I was a celebrated Old Lesbian at age 76, I was very happy. I love planning and enjoying activities that empower women and deepen their connections with each other.







Photo taken by  
Thea Ernest

## Mev (1955) and Nancy (1953)

Did you ever think all those years ago  
That the world would be such a crazy show  
As we mark the time and recall the past  
Did you ever think it would go so fast

As I trace the path grateful to  
Have walked along this road with you  
And I realize as I turn a page  
This looking back is a gift of age

*- from song by Ann Reed, Gift of Age on album by same name*

### **Mev - a Proud Lesbian Amazon - holds her Labrys with Confidence...**

Labrys - "the A-mazing Female Mind that cuts through the double binds and doublebinding words of patriarchy; the double ax of Wild wisdom and wit that breaks through the mazes of man-made mystification, cutting the mindbindings of master-minded doublethink; Power of Discernment which divines the difference between Reality and unreality, between Natural Wild and elementary fabrications."

—Mary Daly, *Wickedary*, p. 142

