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LONNEKE VAN DEN HOONAARD

International Gay and Lesbian Centre and Archives

TRANSLATED BY MERILEE DRANOW

ABN AMRO Bank

IHLIA is the International Gay and Lesbian Information Centre and Archives. Based in Amsterdam, the Centre houses a collection of socially relevant documentation on gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgenders. It is the primary organization in the Netherlands dedicated to preserving the heritage of this community. IHLIA organizes exhibitions and other activities to promote the visibility of its leading-edge archives, which document lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) history. These comprehensive, high-quality archives feature a number of unique personal and organizational collections and are of great national and international significance.

According to Thijs Tromp (2011), life reviews help people accept the lives they've lived; strengthen our understanding of the relationship between individual stories; and allow older people to tell their stories with increasingly more hope and optimism.

“Pink” life stories add another dimension to this experience because the stories of LGBT seniors are unique; they came of age at a time when their sexual orientation was taboo. Recording their stories helps us understand how they coped. Life stories chronicle the individual histories of gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgenders, making accounts of their experience accessible to future generations.

In 2012, IHLIA teamed up with Amstelring, an elderly care umbrella organization, to launch the life story project under which trained volunteers write down the life stories of older LGBT people. Using interviews, these volunteers transformed the stories of their subjects into books, adding photos and other memorabilia.

The first series of pink stories was published in 2013. One purpose is to break the taboo on discussing sexual diversity at elderly care centers and in schools. In the Netherlands, care centers are rated on how actively they promote the well-being of LGBT seniors. A “pink award” is given to institutions

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that perform well in this area. The Amstelring care center umbrella organization loans copies of pink stories to LGBT center residents to encourage reminiscence.

The stories are part of IHLIA's collection, making them accessible to the public for research and reference purposes. IHLIA is currently organizing an exhibition of portraits of participants in the first series of pink stories. It will travel to other organizations, increasing attention to the project and to the position of LGBT seniors.

It is important that these biographies are published, as very few people are aware of the personal and social battle these older people fought. Although we have made great strides in winning acceptance, we tend to forget that older LGBT people grew up in very different circumstances, at a time when they could be arrested or fired for their sexual orientation. That has left its mark on these individuals in a unique way. This generation made an important contribution to advancing the social equality of LGBT people.

So there is real urgency here: we need to record the stories of a group of older people who may not be with us much longer. We cannot run the risk of allowing these priceless stories to disappear.

REFERENCE

Tromp, Thijs. (2011). *Het Verleden als Uitaging [History as a Challenge]*. Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Boekencentrum Uitgevers.

CONTRIBUTORS

Lonneke van den Hoonaard is the Managing Director of IHLIA. She is an expert in managing projects at the intersection of emancipation and information facilities. Under her leadership, IHLIA has increased outreach and participation in national and international networks. For details about the structure and method of the pink stories, see www.ihlia.nl.

Merilee Dranow is a Senior Financial Translator and Editor at ABN AMRO. She has worked as a Dutch–English translator, editor, and writer since 1994, specializing in finance and communication. Merilee obtained a B.A. in English and Religious Studies from Wesleyan University in 1986.