



Lavender Notes

*Lavender Seniors of the East Bay
a Program of the
Oakland LGBTQ Community Center*

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Celebrating 28+ years of service and positive change

May 2023- Volume 29 Issue 5

Sue Witt

22nd November 1940 – 2nd April 2023

Sue Witt, a long-time supporter of Lavender Seniors, passed away on April 2, 2023, at the age of 82 from complications of multiple sclerosis and dementia. A strong and determined woman, she actually 'graduated' from hospice three times before her passing.

Sue was born in Georgia on November 22, 1940. She was proud of her Jewish heritage with its joys and challenges in the conservative South. Her family lived together under one roof. They included her mother, Fannie; her father, Hymie; her aunt, Sarah; her brother, Kenny, and her maternal grandmother.



Sue – age 6 - Georgia

Sue was a very smart, rambunctious young girl who did not 'fit' into family and cultural expectations for Southern belles. She loved science and graduated from Newcomb College with a BA in Chemistry. Immediately after graduation she was hired by the US Department of Agriculture in Albany, CA, where she worked as a chemist for the next 45 years. She was proud of being a woman in science and of co-authoring several studies despite lacking advanced degrees.

Sue was very social. She was well-known for her lavish dinners and hot tub parties. Her understanding of food chemistry, extreme taste sensitivity and family food traditions contributed to her outstanding cooking skills. She loved camping, hunting mushrooms, bike riding, and her community of lesbian and straight friends. An avid animal-lover, she brought her dog on her

adventures whenever possible. Sue even rescued and nurtured a baby opossum, Sweet Pea. Sweet Pea feasted on home-made sausage and fruit, possibly the best fed opossum on Planet Earth! In this 2015 photo, Sue is shown with a puppy in Alaska at a sled-dog breeding and training facility.



Sue happily came out as a lesbian several years after her move to the East Bay. She was active socially and politically in the lesbian community. She sponsored and cooked for a restaurant at Ollie's bar in Oakland, plus ran the older women's tent at the Michigan Women's Music Festival. Over the years, she contributed generously to various lesbian and community organizations. She was a force in the Pacific Center, leading discussion/support groups for many years at the well-attended Thursday night SOL (Slightly Older Lesbians) gatherings there

"As one of the regular group facilitators at SOL," said John David Dupree, a former Pacific Center employee, "she had a loyal following of women who would line up down the hall to be in her group, no matter what the subject to be discussed. Her Southern charm shown through, I guess, so everyone felt good being around her!"



Sue, Lindo and Karen, 2019

During the last years of her life, Sue was visited often by friends, including her old work buddies, who held celebrations with her at Elder Hostel in Oakland. Below is a photo of her eating lunch with friends, Lindo and Karen, in her senior living facility.

One of the Friendly Visitor volunteers who worked with Sue – and became a friend – wanted to share one of their first interactions with Sue, which made them appreciate the many changes that had taken place during Sue's very full life, lived with enthusiasm, conviction and dignity.

"I'll never forget my first conversation with Sue, who had mild dementia at the time," recalls Lindo Bacon. "Though I'm non-binary, Sue saw me as a woman. When I casually mentioned my wife, she responded 'What planet do you live on?' Sue did not fully grasp how much the world had changed or that we could be married. But our conversations certainly helped me appreciate the many changes that took place during her lifetime. I think that at some level she got that these changes happened precisely because of women like her who lived their lives so authentically and proudly."

Her dear long-time friend, Ruth Hurvitz, coordinated her care during these last few years. Sue is missed, of course, but leaves behind warm memories of great social gatherings, outdoor adventures, unique dinner parties and love for her friends. Many of her friends remember her particularly for her intelligence, humor, helpfulness to others at work and in the women's community in the Greater Bay Area.



Sue and Ruth – 2013



There will be an in-person memorial gathering of friends and family members, probably during Pride Month in June. Details will be announced via e-mail and through this newsletter.

Donations are suggested in her name to Bay Area Lesbian Archives, Lavender Seniors of the East Bay, MotherTongue Feminist Readers Theater, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change or the community organization dearest to the donor's heart.

An Exciting New Look at "Stories of Our Lives"

Two writers from the LGBTQ+ community here in the East Bay have volunteered to continue producing the long-standing tradition of "Stories of Our Lives" in this monthly newsletter. What the tag-teaming duo has decided to do initially is introduce each other to our readers - Jenny Pardini interviewed and wrote this column about Jamie McGrath for the May issue; then Jamie McGrath will interview and write a column about Jenny Pardini for the June issue.

They will then be interested in getting suggestions from the community of LGBTQ+ seniors (and allies) who would be good candidates to be featured in future columns. Thank you, Jenny and Jamie!



Jamie McGrath

Jamie McGrath is the second of eight children in a large Mormon family. Born in June of 1958 in Los Angeles, this Gemini describes her childhood as noisy. With both parents coming from small families, they wanted to grow a large family of their own. That idea was continued by Jamie's siblings, making her an aunt to many.

At 3 years old Jamie's parents moved the family to El Paso where she spent the next 10 years. During her elementary school years, she recalls having crushes on girls as early as 3rd or 4th grade. Jamie had a strong sense of who she was at an early age. While she was not interested in being a boy, growing up female in Mormonism's sexist culture was suffocating.

In 5th grade she was asked to write about her life's ambition, which she identified as "to be an unmarried librarian." In her youth she visited the library almost daily and had a goal of reading her way across every shelf and section of the library, not realizing that librarians regularly acquire new books... When her family made the move to the Bay Area at the start of her teenage years, she was sad to leave her friends in Texas, but happy to accept no longer having to wear dresses to school.



Jamie, the shy one on the right in 1st photo with her older sister, Wendy.



1992 with brothers David and Daniel at their dad's wake



Jamie McGrath 2022

During Jamie's teenage years she stayed devoted to the Mormon faith and was blind to the queerness surrounding her in the Bay Area. She managed to flirt her way into a prom date with a boy, but didn't otherwise have an active dating life at that time. Reflecting on her Mormon upbringing she appreciates the good things she learned, saying "Mormons are helpful, kind people in general with a deep devotion to volunteerism, public service and community." After high school, she attended Brigham Young University and served a Mission in England, where she met the woman who would years later become her first romantic partner.



Sister McGrath, England London South Mission -- end of 1980 with Bessie, who made Jamie and her companion a delicious dinner at least once a month and sent them home with a chocolate cake.

Jamie's first rift with the church came when they disfellowshipped her, which is a step before excommunication. It was very painful to feel judged for who she loved and to have her faith questioned on that basis. Her focus was, and is, on being a good, ethical person who deserves to be treated fairly. Jamie eventually chose to be excommunicated and looked for a religious community that would help her find a balance between faith and knowing that there is nothing wrong with who she is. She now attends the Kehilla Synagogue in Oakland where she gets to sing in Hebrew. Singing has been a constant source of joy throughout Jamie's life.

After BYU, Jamie lived in Florida from 1985-1995. She would spend some of that time in a relationship with her English partner and pursuing a Masters in Library Science. Unfortunately, "love does not always conquer all," and the challenges of having a partner who cannot access the same legal privileges of visas and residency as a heterosexual couple took its toll on the relationship.

When she got a job in a children's department at a library, there was a controversy happening over gay books being censored. Jamie knew she'd found her home where she could advocate for intellectual freedom as a professional priority with other librarians who believe that anyone accessing a library should be able to get information and learn. This kept her on the path

she had identified as a child.

Youngest brother, Daniel (also gay), and Jamie visiting the Gila Cliff Dwellings, New Mexico.



Her own experiences in coming out to her family put her in the best possible position to be an excellent big sister when her youngest brother, Daniel, came out. Jamie had wanted to bring home a partner for a visit one year – her mother threw a fit. Jamie later realized her mom’s objection was more about how seeing her happy and successful in a same-sex relationship might encourage her brother. She checked in on him weekly. Based on her own experience, she advised waiting to tell their mom until finishing high school and leaving home. She also stressed that telling the church out of guilt would only come back to punish him. Over the years, Jamie was willing to be the one to take the lead with her siblings and niblings¹ to pave the path for Daniel.

Living in Florida, Jamie had to be vigilant when deciding to be out at work. Anita Bryant, the “homophobic orange juice queen”, brought fear to many LGBTQ+ people in the state. Among the most comforting things Jamie found while living in Fort Myers was a mail newsletter produced by Ina Mae Murri for lesbian [ex]Mormons called “An Affinity for Women.” She could feel supported and know she was not alone as she read what her “sisters” were experiencing each month.

[Editor's note: Ina Mae Murri was one of the co-founders of Lavender Seniors of the East Bay, with her long-term partner, Stella Lopez-Armijo].

Connecting with peers was critical for Jamie in escaping the sense of isolation and understanding the painful legacies that many people struggle with from families and communities of origin. Jamie turned to the president of her local Jewish Federation, a great role model, who advised her not to be afraid and encouraged activism instead of fear. Under a false name, Jamie edited and wrote articles for the monthly Southwest Florida queer newsletter, Support-line. She also sang with the Southwest Florida Gay & Lesbian Chorus (SWFGLC) from its founding in the early 1990s.



Eventually, Jamie moved back to the Bay and took a job with the City of Alameda Library, then libraries in Oakland. In the late 1990s she also joined the American Library Association GLBT Round Table, the nation's first queer professional organization founded in 1970 -- and delightedly read innumerable books to vote on [Stonewall Book Awards | Awards & Grants \(ala.org\)](#) the Stonewall

Book Awards. As a public library manager, she served on her library system's Lesbian/Gay Collections and Services committee. In addition to regularly enriching offerings for library users, they spearheaded staff training to combat anti-queer bias after a difficult public censorship controversy. She continues to educate herself through adult education courses such as those on publishing

and editing.

Language and singing have been important interests to Jamie throughout her life. In college she was advised to study German to support her comparative literature studies, but other languages that have interested her are modern Hebrew and Spanish. To deepen her knowledge of Spanish she has read a lot and listened to many audio books to improve her skills.



Jamie sang with San Francisco Lesbian/Gay Chorus 1995-98

She also sang with the La Peña Community Chorus which allowed her opportunities to perform in Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Cuba with the group. Upon moving to Oakland-Berkeley CA in 1995, she began singing with L/GCSF, Lesbian/Gay Chorus of San Francisco (now the Queer Chorus of San Francisco), and served on the board of directors.

In the March 1996 Tribute to Elton John, she sang "I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues." From March 2011 to June 2022 Jamie sang with Voices Lesbian A Cappella for Justice. Jamie first connected to Lavender Seniors through Voices during a performance for LSEB and has received the newsletter ever since.



Voices Lesbian A Cappella for Justice at a luncheon for Lavender Seniors



1995 Jamie's first holiday back in the Bay Area with her niece and nephews



Jamie and Ellen, her sweetheart of the past 15+ years

Reflecting on relationships and family, Jamie says she would like to have had children, but wanted to do it with a partner. She did consider co-parenting with male couple, but waited because she also knew it could be complicated to negotiate parenting decisions as a group. Instead, she focused her love on lots of nibblings. Since two of Jamie's siblings live in California her return here was, in part, to be near their families.

Jamie lives with "her sweetheart" Ellen, her partner of close to 20 years. Relationships are work, but the work can be worth it with the right person. As this issue comes out, Jamie and Ellen are headed to Belize so she can relax before being put to work as a new writer of the Stories of Our Lives. She noted that the pandemic and isolation increased the crankiness of many people and sees these profiles as a way to combat that because it involves connecting with others. We will close with Jamie's words that connect gratitude with the spirit of Lavender Seniors...

"Ina Mae was a wonderful foremother for me," Jamie says. "She and Stella let

me stay with them for two weeks when I moved back to the Bay Area in September 1995 -- I so appreciated being with them while I looked for a new place to live. I was so proud when she and Stella helped pioneer Lavender Seniors -- that's the kind of community care and forethought I learned as a youngster. Even now, she is still mentoring me. I've been thinking about what to do with my journals, and searching for Ina Mae online pointed me to a good choice! Her papers in the LGBTQ+ Religious Archives, University of Utah, include letters from me."

Ina and Stella, we miss you -- all your generosity and activism lives on in our hearts!"

¹Nibling is a gender-neutral term used to refer to a child of one's sibling as a replacement for "niece" or "nephew". The word is thought to have been coined in the early 1950s, but was relatively obscure for several decades before being revived in recent years.

CONNECTIONS



Have you moved out of the area, do you want to get in contact with other Lavender Seniors near you or someone you have lost contact with? [Email us](#) and we will try to help out. No information will be shared without your specific permission.

LAVENDER SENIORS FRIENDLY VISITOR PROGRAM HAS VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE.

Volunteers with the Lavender Seniors Friendly Visitor program are background checked, interviewed and trained, after which they are matched with a senior to visit regularly, usually for a couple hours each week. Visitors can share stories, chat about mutual interests and current events, and if both are willing and able, volunteers can take their seniors out for a walk in the park, a bite to eat, a cup of coffee, shopping or maybe a movie or a trip to the museum.

We ask volunteers to make a commitment of at least six months.

If you are in need of a Friendly Visitor, we can help with that too!

Please contact us at info@lavenderseniors.org or (510) 424-7240 and we will be in touch with you soon. Thank You!

Third Friday Lunch Bunch

Every **Third Friday @ 12:30pm**
North Oakland Senior Center
5714 MLK Way



Please call **510-781-2926** or email: jessie@oaklandlgbtqcenter.org to **RSVP**



Mellow Saxophone plus "One Medical Seniors"

There was such positive feedback to our having Wendy Clymer come with her viola and amazing story-telling skills in February that we've been on the prowl to find other musicians who might come with their talents and story-telling again from time to time. Plus we're always on the lookout for information on easing our way into "maturity" in the health-care arena. So this month's Third Friday Lunch Bunch is just that – a combination of meeting our universal needs – for both music and good health in our lives – as we age with pride and grace.

Ashley Jemison – a community ally and accomplished saxophonist – will entertain us with her new school vibe of smooth jazz. Her repertoire includes current styles of R&B, pop music and a unique improvisational twist leaving her audiences wanting more. With a mother and father who were musicians, it was inevitable that she would follow at least a bit in



their footsteps. A breast cancer survivor, she vowed to focus on her music once she got to the other side of that battle. Since making that career shift, she has been working up and down the West Coast. Provoking emotion with every note she plays, it is guaranteed that you will not leave an Ashley Jemison performance without feeling moved to dance, to smile or perhaps to tears. Her goal with every performance is to uplift the spirits of her audience.

On the informational side of the program will be a presentation by staff of One Medical. They will be describing their "One Medical Seniors" initiative – a new program that accepts both the original Medicare, but also some Medicare Advantage Plans and most insurance providers. There are many East Bay locations. Rumor is they **may** be bringing the odd door prize, as well!

From the One Medical website: <https://www.onemedical.com/locations/sf>

We're making people in the Bay Area fall in love with their doctor's office. One Medical, in partnership with UCSF Health, is making it faster, easier, and more enjoyable to get the care you need for yourself or your family. We've thoughtfully designed our entire experience around your needs and your comfort — from longer appointments that start on time to warm, calming spaces that put you at ease. Use our [insurance finder](#) to see where you're covered when you travel - we have offices in many major cities across the country that feel just like you're home.

In order to ensure that enough food is ordered from the caterer, anyone intending to attend this program on Friday, 19th May, 12:30-2:30pm at North Oakland Seniors Center, 5714 MLK Jr Way (corner of 58th Street), should RSVP, using the following link, noting preferences for vegetarian or non-vegetarian menu choices: <https://forms.gle/NPnk7tk9ZhPviLaw7>. Once you've completed the form, click on "submit" at the bottom to finalize your RSVP.

Those who don't have internet access should RSVP via contacting Jessie Spivey, Director of Elder Services at the Oakland LGBTQ Community Center: +! (510) 781-2926. For any other questions or concerns, he can also be contacted at jessie@oaklandlgbtqcenter.org.

SOCIAL



SENIORS

LAST FRIDAY
OF EVERY
MONTH



A NEW SOCIAL GATHERING FOR LGBTQ SENIORS
STARTING MARCH 31ST 12:30PM @ THE OAKLAND LGBTQ COMMUNITY CENTER
CALL 510-781-2926 OR EMAIL: [JESSIE@OAKLANDLGBTQCENTER.ORG](mailto:jessie@oaklandlgbtqcenter.org) FOR RSVP LINK



SAVE THE DATE

To Commemorate The

20th ANNUAL Healthy Living Festival



"Promoting Health and Wellness for 55+ Adults"

**In-Person Event: Oakland Zoo
9777 Golf Links Rd.**

**Thursday, September 28th
9:00 AM - 2:00 PM**

Registration limited to the first 2500 Alameda County older adults, their family, friends, and/or providers!



Join us as we take collective action to improve the quality of life for seniors throughout Alameda County!

Register at
Eventbrite
to attend!

<https://bit.ly/2023HLF>

For More Information:
(510) 729-0852
Mary.USOAC@gmail.com

For Travel Training:
(510) 729-0851
Chonita.USOAC@gmail.com

Take action on senior quality of life issues!
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This online support group LGBTQ+ Community Support Caregiving for our Families and Friends offers a place for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender caregivers of adults with chronic health problems to discuss the unique issues of caring for their loved ones.

Well Connected

Enriching lives and supporting well-being.

(FORMERLY SENIOR CENTER WITHOUT WALLS)

Community Phone Calls

This award-winning program offers activities, education, support groups, and friendly conversation over the phone or online.

Just a few of the things offered:

(The times are no longer listed in the generic catalog, once you have signed up you will get a link to a catalog with times in your time zone)

LGBTQ Chat

Wednesdays, 5/10, 5/24, 6/14, 6/28, 7/12, 7/26, 8/9, 8/23

This group is intended for participants who identify as LGBTQ, and is an opportunity to connect with others socially in a supportive environment, where participants can share individual and collective experiences. We will create an inclusive place to share our stories with each other and build a sense of community. Facilitated by Kay George

Newcomers Welcome

Mondays, 5/22, 6/26, 7/24, 8/28

Are you confused about how to start "connecting" with Well Connected? We will guide you through the process of making that first phone call, or how to join online. Learn about what those icons mean in the catalog, and how to take a turn to talk. No question is too silly or simple! Facilitated by Annette Balter and Amber Carroll, Front Porch

View the Current catalog of community phone calls [here](#). Check the [website](#) for more information. To participate in these or other Well Connected telephone activities, or to learn more about their programs, call 877-797-7299 or email coviaconnections@covia.org.



Out Standing Seniors - Hayward - Sponsored by Pacific Center
May 2 12:30 - 1:30 p.m. (1st Tuesday)

Meets via Zoom email outstandingseniors@pacificcenter.org for info.
A welcoming space for LGBTQI seniors 50+ to share thoughts, feelings, resources, information, and support. FREE, though donations are welcome.

Living OUT in Livermore - Sponsored by Pacific Center
May 2 2:00 - 3:30 p.m. (1st Tuesdays)

Meets via Zoom email livingoutlivermore@pacificcenter.org for info.
A welcoming space for LGBTQI seniors 50+ to safely share thoughts, feelings, resources, information, and support. FREE, though donations are welcome.

Older & Out Therapy Group - Hayward - Sponsored by Pacific Center Meets via Zoom Tuesdays 3:30 - 5:00 p.m.

Please email olderandoutgroups@pacificcenter.org for more information. No drop-ins. Intake is required for attendance.
Free therapy group for LGBTQIA+ community members age 55+

Life after 40 - Gay & Bisexual Men's Group

Meets in person at Oakland LGBTQ Community Center every 1st Tuesday at 7:00pm & virtually every 3rd Tuesday at 7pm.

A support group for men over 40

Older & Out Therapy Group - Oakland - Sponsored by Pacific Center In-person at Oakland LGBTQ Community Center

Wednesdays 1:15pm - 2:45pm

Please email olderandoutgroups@pacificcenter.org for more information. Intake is required for attendance.

Free therapy group for LGBTQIA+ community members age 55+

Older & Out Therapy Group - Berkeley - Sponsored by Pacific Center In-person at N. Berkeley Senior Center

Fridays 3:00 - 4:30 p.m.

Please email olderandoutgroups@pacificcenter.org for more information. Intake is required for attendance.

Free therapy group for LGBTQIA+ community members age 55+

Rainbow Seniors

May 9 & 23 12:30 p.m. (2nd & 4th Tuesdays)

San Leandro Senior Community Center

email rainbowseniors@pacificcenter.org for info.

A welcoming space for LGBTQI seniors 50+ to share thoughts, feelings, resources, information, and support. FREE, though donations are welcome.

Tri-Valley Rainbows - Sponsored by Pacific Center

May 18 5:30 - 7:00 p.m. (3rd Thursday)

Meets via Zoom email trivalleyrainbows@pacificcenter.org for info.

A welcoming space for LGBTQI seniors 50+ to share thoughts, feelings, resources, information, and support. FREE, though donations are welcome.

Oakland Third Friday Lunch Bunch

Sponsored by City of Oakland Aging/Adult Services, Lavender Seniors of the East Bay & Oakland LGBTQ Community Center

May 19 12:30 - 2:30 p.m. (Third Friday)

North Oakland Senior Center

This month's program: (" Mellow Saxophone plus One Medical Seniors- see info above)

Social Seniors - Last Friday
May 26 12:30 p.m.
In person at Oakland LGBTQ Community Center
See flyer above for registration info.

Lavender Seniors of the East Bay
a Program of the Oakland LGBTQ Community Center
Advisory Council

Dr. John David Dupree
Beckie Underwood

Dr. Melissa Ginne
Barbara Jue
Estelle Eskenazi

Lavender Seniors of the East Bay
a Program of the Oakland LGBTQ Community Center

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info@lavenderseniors.org

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