

Calm and collected

How to maintain composure while being ensconced in a library's special collections

"So how does it feel to be collected?" asked a friend.

It took me a moment to interpret the question. I've never been the most collected person in the world—or had something I'd written popped up in an anthology while I wasn't looking?

Then I got it. She was asking about the University of Oregon Library and its Special Collections. And about my work being archived there.

"Feel?" I pondered. I'm bad at recognizing my emotions. Sometimes I get so busy I forget to feel them. "Relieved," I told her. "Grateful."

I probably should be wild with excitement, but really, I'm just honored and relieved and grateful.

I'd been carrying around old manuscripts, correspondence, lesbian literary research, incomplete journals and the like since junior high when I started writing. I never knew if I'd want to refer back to something, rewrite or just reminisce, but in recent years, as the movers grunt under the ever-increasing heft of file cabinets, it's become clear that this stuff is just moldering away, one more burden and complication in my life.

Then came my shining knight in the guise of Linda J. Long, manuscripts librarian at the University of Oregon. I'd received word from Tee Corinne that Linda was interested in archiving Oregon lesbian history and materials. I've lived here for fourteen years and written most of my books here so I guess I have a part in that history. Timidly, I pecked out my query to her e-mail address.

The library already had Jean Mountaingrove's and Ruth Mountaingrove's materials. (Ruth and Jean founded Rootworks in Southern Oregon and published *WomenSpirit* magazine for many years.) Linda has ambitious plans to add to her Pacific Northwest collection. Later I would learn of other acquisitions—*Calyx* magazine, Sally Gearhart, Joanna Russ—that confirmed my decision.

Besides moving what turned out to be 11 boxes of papers from abode to abode, I'd worried over the years. Worried that it was vain and presumptuous of me to value even my scribbles. Worried about the effects of flood, fire and time on cheap paper. Worried that this stew of my mind would be just so much clutter. Worried that this Lover would have to dispose of at my demise. Worried that dykes would be silenced by an inability to value and preserve our own work.

Then came Linda J. Long's response to my post: "I can't tell you what a thrill it was to receive a message from you.... We would be honored to accept your papers."

Oh, gosh. I bet she says that to all the girls. But I didn't care. She wanted my work! My years of effort, lost relationships, wobbly income—it was all worth it! I wished I could tell the late Valerie Taylor the news, and that her papers are at Cornell.

Feel? I damped down on my excitement. There were some questions. One woman protested that Nike contributed to the U of O. Yes, well, I already hire out my life to earn a living and write for papers that run alcohol ads.

Life's a compromise. My ethics are as clean as I can keep them and survive.

I liked that the repository would be accessible to me. I wouldn't have to fly to the East Coast if I needed something. But would I always be in Oregon? Never say always, but I sensed a new, strong root shoot deep into the earth of my adoptive state, and that felt wonderful.

Feels wonderful. Rooted, relieved, grateful, honored.

Relieved that I could lift this shell of past work from my back and lay it to rest where, whether or not anyone ever looks at it, it will be relatively safe.

Grateful to the vision of Linda J. Long, who really was thrilled.



When she and assistant Duffy Knaus arrived at our home to cart away the hoard, I could feel the excitement. I'd been worried about separation anxiety. It happened to be a sunny, breezy spring day—the first and last for a couple of weeks. Duffy identified wild flowers and trees, we all licked and dripped ice cream from cones like kids at a party, and Linda quickly, efficiently, painlessly labeled and packed into a state-owned vehicle the boxes containing my heart and soul.

I had not a moment's doubt. I trusted these women immediately. As Linda spoke of her hopes and plans for the collection, I realized these scraps and notebooks would become part of her heart and soul.

"Even though I myself am not an artist nor a scholar," Linda wrote me later, "I can use my own talents and training to preserve the works of artists so that scholars can use these records to document a very rich history. It's a joy to implement my vision for creating a lesbian collection!"

Honored. Honored that my body of work will be preserved, along with the work of other lesbian writers, by capable and caring lesbian hands.

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Jay and Fred had been staying in the Cottage at the See Vue Motel south of Yachats for years. On this particular visit, Jay was very ill. His T-cells were low and he was too weak to walk. All indications were that this would be his last stay at their favorite spot on the Oregon Coast.

It was the hardest thing Fred and Jay had ever had to do—say good-bye to their time spent together at the ocean. Two years later, after miracle-working drugs and Fred's love and support, Jay's T-cells are normal and all signs of his previous illness are gone. They return to the Cottage to celebrate Jay's renewed health and the promise of a long life lived together. They stroll on the beach, play with their new puppy and spend the evenings snuggled in bed.

Oh, and Fred beams.

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