

Author's Note: One of the most beneficial aspects of moving to Los Angeles, beginning in 1979, was an opportunity to meet and work with several of the founders of the Homophile movement. By the time I met them, they were quite elderly, but still lucid and able to talk for hours about their perspectives on the LGBTQ+ movement.

The first founder I met was Jim Kepner. He had joined the Mattachine Society in 1952, and he was one of the main writers for ONE Magazine, which began publication in 1952. He also helped build a substantial library at ONE Inc's Los Angeles office. In the early 1960s Jim went out on his own, and concentrated on purchasing or gaining a copy of every gay-related book he could find. He worked at gay bathhouses during their slow hours, so he could concentrate on his readings. His favorite job was as a taxi driver, because whenever he was waiting for a rider he could concentrate on his readings. He also scanned as many newspapers as possible, and he cut out any article that in any way mentioned queer topics. By the 1970s his library had grown so large that he could not contain all the books and files in his apartment. So he founded the National Gay Archives, and rented a storefront in Hollywood to house it.

Shortly after my arrival in Los Angeles in 1983, Jim invited me to join the board of directors of the National Gay Archives. In 1984 I was elected by the board to become the board's president. I accepted the role on condition that lesbian activist June Mazer would become the board's vice president, and that we would rename the National Gay Archives to become the INTERnational Gay AND LESBIAN Archives. My focus was to build the international holdings of the Archives, and to be supportive as June Mazer and her devoted partner Bunny MacCulloch greatly expanded the women's collection. Donna Smith was treasurer and David Moore [sp?] was secretary.

Our major activity was to raise money to pay the rent and utilities for the building. Each month it was a struggle, just to keep the doors open. To save money, Jim Kepner gave up his rented house and moved into a tiny room in the basement of the Archives. I did not like that at all, because the damp basement was injurious to Jim's health, and the fact that Jim cooked his meals on a hotplate increased the danger of a fire that might burn the collection.

So, when Jim turned 62 I helped him prepare his application to receive Social Security payments. At last Jim had some dependable income, but it was not enough, so we had to continue to raise money. I was co-founder and chair of the Committee on Lesbian and Gay History, which I managed to convince the board of directors of the American Historical Association to make it formally an Affiliated Society of the Association. In this role I had direct contact with almost every queer historian in the USA. I wrote personal letters to most of them, with Professor John D'Emilio contributing the most money. Together with my own and others' contributions, we managed to meet the monthly charges, and the Archives gradually built a more secure financial base.

The daily grind of fundraising convinced me that to be secure the Archives needed to move to a university campus. When I was a visiting professor at UCLA, from 1981 to 1984, I managed to convince the UCLA Graduate Research Library to take an interest in the increasingly large library collection. But, unfortunately, UCLA's librarian insisted that the only way they would accept the donation of the collection would be to integrate the Archives into their larger library. Our board of directors were unanimous in our rejection of UCLA's offer. Though we wanted the security of the collection, we all insisted that the Archives should stay together as a separate library.

I struggled to raise money not only for the Gay Archives, but also for money to support Jim Kepner as well. I would agree to make a money payment for Jim to write a chapter in his autobiography. Jim resisted at first, but then he started churning out chapter after chapter. In fact, he wrote so much that there was no way a publisher would accept such a long book manuscript. Jim's magnum opus was never published, but it exists as a manuscript that is protected in ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, and available for scholars doing research on the homophile movement in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

In 1987 I won a coveted Fulbright Scholar Award, which took me to Indonesia, where I became a visiting professor of American Studies at Gadjah Mada University. During the year and a half that I lived in the cultural center of Yogyakarta, on the Indonesian island of Java, I also helped to start Indonesia's first gay magazine, which was typed on my computer. I provided the first editor of the magazine, Sindhu Suyana, with a free room to live in my rented house.

When I returned to Los Angeles in late 1988, instead of rejoining the Archives board of directors, I set my sights on becoming part of the administration of ONE Institute. In 1979 Jim Kepner had introduced me to Mattachine Society founder Harry Hay, and to William Dorr Legg, the main founder of ONE Inc. in 1952. Dorr had an imperious personality, which turned some people off, but he held a more intense strength of resolve than anyone I had ever met. He was noted as a fighter with a sharp tongue for queer people of all kinds. In the 1950s he collected a following that included all the marvelous diversity of Californians: African Americans, Latinx, Asians, transgender, disabled people, women and non-binary people. He vigorously stuck up for all of these groups. In ONE Magazine he authored an article titled, "I am Glad I am Homosexual," in 1956 no less--far ahead of its time. Dorr's advice to younger people was never to give in to homophobia.

A typical Dorr saying was when he once told me, "Walter, it is very easy to win in life. You just simply outlive your enemies!" Those words have helped to fortify me in the struggles I have been through, even though I learned it is not actually necessary for those who oppose you to die. They might retire, move elsewhere, or just back off. In certain cases they might even change their mind and apologize for their negative behavior. The important thing to realize is that they

will not always be in a position of power over you, and you have the option to just sit back and wait. No one remains in power forever. Just live long enough and you will see the wisdom of Dorr's teachings.

Over the years Dorr Legg and Jim Kepner became my most important mentors, and I learned more from them than any professors I ever encountered in academia. In 1994 I convinced USC to provide a free apartment for Jim Kepner to live in, relieving him from worry about how he would pay his bills, so that he could concentrate entirely on his writing.

Jim also introduced me to Don Slater, the founder of the Homosexual Information Center. Dorr, Don, Jim and others had worked effectively together at ONE Inc. in the 1950s. ONE Magazine was carried at newsstands across the nation. But in the early 1960s factions developed. Don wanted to focus on building ONE Magazine, and felt that diverting the organization into too many areas would blunt its impact. Dorr and Jim, on the other hand, wanted to establish a research and educational center. In 1956 they established ONE Institute of Homophile Studies. They taught research seminars and classes, published bibliographies and research reports. ONE was the founding organization for the field of study now called LGBTQ+ Studies, which exists at many universities across the nation.

ONE Institute Press published several books. While Dorr was an effective editor, he did not write what I felt was his most important contribution. For years I tried to persuade Dorr to write and publish his autobiography, just as I had done with Jim Kepner. Dorr joked that the title of the book should be "The World's First Professional Queer," since he had resigned his job as a landscape architect in favor of becoming the fulltime director of ONE Institute. Finally, we came up with an outline for the book, and Dorr was on a streak of writing on a daily basis. True to form, Dorr insisted that the book should not be an autobiography, but a history of ONE Institute and its many contributions to the emergence of queer scholarship. His choice for a title was *Homophile Studies in Theory and Practice*.

Although my work on the manuscript was mainly in the background, Dorr insisted on placing my name as a co-editor on the cover of the book. When the book was published in 1994, Dorr held the first copy close to his heart and told me, "Now my life's work is done."

A few weeks after that, Dorr confided at our ONE Institute board meeting, "My mind seems just as lucid as ever, but I can feel my body shutting down." Dorr was so central to ONE that some feared that ONE would disappear within a year of his death.

Rather than trying to deny the reality of Dorr's death, I took the opportunity by staying with him after the other members of our ONE board meeting had left. I told him sincerely, from the bottom of my heart, "Dorr, I want you to be totally confident that after you are gone, I am pledging all I hold dear, for you to know that I will do everything in my power to advance and expand the noble effort you have made for so many decades. ONE Institute will not disappear, but will grow and blossom beyond our present understanding. Dorr knew he did not have time to

live, but at age 89 he was prepared. I gave him a hug, and left. Three days later, on July 27, 1994, Dorr died peacefully in his sleep. More than most people on earth, he left a mark on history, and could list a series of important accomplishments he had made.

At a large memorial service that we organized, I gave a speech noting Dorr's many "firsts" and accomplishments. But I also took the opportunity to announce my initiative to convince USC to offer a building to house ONE's large library, on condition that it combine with Jim Kepner's International Gay and Lesbian Archives (IGLA). I felt that the factionalization of the movement that occurred in the 1960s was a tragedy, and it should not prevent the reunification of ONE and the Archives in the 1990s. Jim Kepner strongly supported my initiative, and immediately after the end of Dorr's memorial service we convened the members of both organizations' boards of directors. In a tense but productive meeting, we worked out a formula in which a new board of directors would be drawn from equal numbers of each board, plus me, who had been on both boards. Then, in a brilliant move that IGLA president John O'Brian suggested, ONE would donate its entire library and archives to become part of IGLA, while the International Gay and Lesbian Archives would at the same time become a division of ONE Institute.

The plan that we worked out over succeeding meetings led to ONE Institute having four divisions. First, the International Gay and Lesbian Archives (having combined both ONE and IGLA's collections) would be the research base. Second, ONE Institute of Advanced Studies, which I had founded and directed since 1988, was intended to raise funds and resources to support scholars in coming to Los Angeles to do research in the archives. Third, ONE Institute Press would continue to publish the results of this research. And fourth, ONE events would publicize this research in exhibits, lectures open to the public, and in the mass media.

We had very little money to accomplish these divisional goals, and all of us agreed that top priority should be given to getting the archives open. USC had donated a two-story 14,000 square foot building, with its own parking lot and gardens, but it was a student fraternity house. Much renovation had to be undertaken to take out bathrooms, remove a massive fireplace, and bust out walls. If I had realized how much work would be involved, I might have removed myself from the campaign, but along with Jim Kepner, John O'Brian, Yolanda Retter, and other dedicated volunteers, we dedicated ourselves to accomplishing our goal.

In the meantime, from the time of my return from Indonesia in 1988, through the next decade, I dedicated my life to building ONE Institute. Dorr Legg's books were the last things published by ONE Institute Press, but we had no money to publish more books. Jim Kepner and I decided to establish a journal that would offer reviews of the plethora of new books being published. While living in Indonesia I realized how prohibitively expensive it was for queer people in poor nations to purchase books. But they could afford to pay a small fee to rent time on a computer at an internet shop, where they could access the newly invented World Wide Web. I decided that at least I wanted to make possible for people around the world to read substantial reviews of such books. Since we could not afford to launch a new journal in print, I convinced USC to fund me

in establishing THE INTERNATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN REVIEW on the internet. I contacted everyone I knew to write reviews of LGBTQ books they had read. Over the next five years, from 1996 to 2001, I served as Founding Editor while publishing over a thousand book reviews. The INTERNATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN REVIEW became the very first academic journal to be published entirely on the internet. I consider it one of my major contributions to the success of our movement.

We had two big shocks in 1997, when Don Slater, a USC graduate who was editor of ONE Magazine in the 1950s and early 1960s, died of heart disease at age 77. Once he died, his longtime partner Tony Reyes donated all of Don's library and papers (including many of the original documents of ONE) to ONE Institute. John O'Brian, Jim Kepner, Vern Bullough, and my graduate student Joseph Hawkins spent uncounted hours organizing, boxing, and cataloging the massive collection before bringing it to the still unfinished building at USC. There were now so many boxes that we had to turn to USC to store the incoming materials in other university buildings. From this point on, if not before, ONE Archives became the largest collection of LGBTQ+ materials in the entire world.

The second shock of 1997 occurred when Jim Kepner's colon cancer perforated his intestine. When John O'Brian, ONE President Flo Fleishman, and I arrived at the hospital to visit him, before admitting us the nurse asked if we were family. Flo was an ordained minister in MCC Church, so she confidently said, "I am Mr. Kepner's pastor Reverend Fleishman, this is Dr. Williams, and Mr. Kepner's adopted son John." I silently resented the question, since that restriction had kept many queer people from being with their loved ones in hospitals. But upon further thought I decided that Flo had not lied. We were in fact Jim's family, the ones who loved him and cared for him more than any others on earth. At age 72, Jim's body gave out, and he succumbed. We were present holding his hands during his final hours.

The memorial service we organized for Jim attracted almost every surviving member of the founding generation of activists from the 1950s: Del Martin and her wife Phylis Lyon, Harry Hay and his partner John Burnside, Hal Call, and many others. I felt honored to share the stage with such important pioneers.

At last, in 2001 the renovations of the ONE building at USC were completed, and with a massive crowd in attendance we held the grand opening of ONE Institute International Gay and Lesbian Archives, dedicated to the memory of both Jim and Dorr. An honored guest was Edith Eyde, who started the first lesbian newsletter in Los Angeles in 1948, and printed it under her clever pen name "Lisa Ben." She often played her guitar at ONE meetings over the years. Edith was one of many gifted pioneers of the LGBTQ movement that I felt privileged to know.

Besides my publications, I consider my work at ONE Archives to be among my major life accomplishments. Whenever I return there, as I see both USC students and scholars from around the world hard at work doing their research, assisted by professionally-trained librarians paid by

USC, I cannot describe in words the sense of pride that I feel to have been part of such a noble effort. The recent successes of the LGBTQ movement did not occur by accident, but were underlain by many years of hard work by activists, journalists, scholars, lawyers, and protestors who refused to give up and who fought against prejudice on many different levels. I am grateful that the University of Southern California has made such a significant financial and intellectual contribution to our world community. I feel honored to have been a professor there, from 1984 to 2010, so that I could be part of that effort.