

# LILLIAN FADERMAN

b. July 18, 1940

## LGBT HISTORIAN

*“My writing has been my activism.”*

Commonly known as the mother of LGBT history, Lillian Faderman is an internationally recognized pioneering lesbian scholar and historian. Her award-winning books have been translated into numerous languages.

Faderman was born in New York during World War II and raised by her mother and aunt, Latvian Jewish immigrants who worked in the garment industry. The remainder of her family died in Europe during the Holocaust.

After moving with her mother and aunt to Los Angeles in her teens, Faderman began acting and modeling and discovered the underground gay bar scene. She bravely came out as a lesbian in 1956 during the Lavender Scare, a challenging period for gay Americans that was closely tied to McCarthyism.

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Faderman went on to study at UC Berkeley, where she paid for her education working as a stripper. She then attended UCLA. She became an English professor at California State University Fresno, where she sought to address long-ignored populations. Toward that end, she co-edited her first published work, an anthology of multi-ethnic literature for the college classroom. Released

in 1969, it was one of the first anthologies of its kind.

Although Faderman longed to write about sexual minorities, homophobia in the 1960s made such work difficult. In the 1970s, however, as feminism entered serious academic discourse, Faderman became one of the first academics to publish books about female same-sex relationships.

A pioneering authority on LGBT history and literature, Faderman has written 11 books. Among other recognition, she has received six Lambda Literary Awards, two American Library Association Awards and several prestigious lifetime achievement awards for her scholarship, including the James Brudner Award from Yale University. The New York Times honored her books “Surpassing the Love of Men” (1981), “Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers” (1991) and “The Gay Revolution” (2015) on its list of Notable Books of the Year. The Guardian named “Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers,” about lesbian life in the 20th century, one of the Top 10 Books of Radical History and “The Gay Revolution” one of the Six Top Books of LGBT Life. “Harvey Milk: His Lives and Death,” her book about the slain gay San Francisco politician, was named Most Valuable Biography of 2018 by The Nation. In addition to her scholarly work, Faderman has published creative nonfiction, including her own memoir and a reconstructed memoir of her mother’s life.

Faderman retired in 2007 and serves as historian in residence for the Lambda Archives of San Diego. She has a son, Avrom, and lives with her partner of more than 45 years, Phyllis Irwin.



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