

Oral Histories of Tompkins County

Archival Finding Aid

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2020-2021 - Voices That Must Be Heard - Oral History Project

The *Voices That Must Be Heard* Oral History Project contains sixteen interviews recorded in between 2020-2021. This project was a collaboration between Civic Ensemble's ReEntry Theatre Program and College Initiative Upstate. Narrators speak to experiences of incarceration and court involvement, substance abuse and harm reduction, family, education, work, and their hopes and dreams for the future. The narrators in these interviews all lived in Tompkins or Cortland Counties at the time of recording, and all of their narratives intersect with Tompkins County. This project was coordinated and supervised by Julia Taylor, Executive Director of Civic Ensemble.

The narratives in these interviews were used to create the 2021 three-part radio play 'Steppin' Into My Shoes' which premiered on WRFI Community Radio in the fall of 2021.

PLEASE NOTE: To protect the identities behind certain stories, three interviews recorded as part of this project were not donated to The History Center archives. The interviews of E.S., K.A.B., and L.H., are held by Civic Ensemble as of 5/20/2023 but no copies exist in The History Center collections.

Trigger Warnings: *Systemic racism, opioid epidemic, mental health, drug overdose, addiction, Mental health, drug use, sobriety, grief/familial loss, Postpartum complications, mental health, substance abuse, description of Child Protective Services investigative actions, addiction, body image, bullying,*

Interviews with:

Leroy Barrett (00:54:19)

Barrett recounts his experiences of growing up in Ithaca in the 1990s while his mother struggled with drug addiction. Pushed into a parental role for his younger siblings while he was still a pre-teen himself, he recalls being taken away to live with his strict father and then fending for himself - with help from friends and extended family - from the age of 16. After living and working in various locations across the country, Barrett returned to Ithaca in 2008, at which point he began to struggle with alcoholism. Joining an Alcoholics Anonymous group with his partner, Amy, Barrett discusses their road to sobriety and his hopes for their future together.

Trigger Warnings: Descriptions of drug use and alcoholism. Occasional strong language

- *Recorded: 3/25/2021*

- *Name of Interviewer: Michael James*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2021-3-25_Barrett-Leroy*
 - *Digital Format: WAV & MP3*
- *Transcript file: OHTC_2021-3-25_Barrett-Leroy_Transcript*
 - *Digital Format: PDF*
- *Recorded as part of the 2020-2021 Voices That Must Be Heard - Oral History Project*

Brian Briggs (00:40:48)

Briggs recalls his childhood and the ways in which his early experiences shaped his adult life. He discusses his initial arrival in the city of Ithaca and the way he lives his life including his use of opioids and other substances. Brian describes the work he has done with programs such as Southern Tier Aids Program (STAP), PDSEP (Peer Delivered Syringe Exchange Program) and REACH (Respectful, Equitable, Access to Compassionate Care) in order to promote harm reduction.

Trigger warning(s): Systemic racism, opioid epidemic, mental health, drug overdose, addiction

- *Recorded: 11/05/20*
- *Name of Interviewer: Regina DiOrio*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2020-11-5_Briggs-Brian*
 - *Digital Format: WAV & MP3*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2020-11-5_Briggs-Brian_Transcript*
 - *Digital Format: PDF*
- *Recorded as part of the 2020-2021 Voices That Must Be Heard - Oral History Project*

Melissa Cady (00:31:16)

Cady reminisces about the events that brought her to Ithaca, her life here with her husband and children, the loss of her husband, and the ways she managed her grief. She talks about the dynamics of her family, both before and after the loss of her husband. She describes her efforts towards sobriety as well as her hopes and plans for the future.

Trigger warnings: Mental health, drug use, sobriety, grief/familial loss

- *Recorded: 10/22/20*
- *Name of Interviewer: Regina DiOrio*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2020-10-22_Cady-Melissa*
 - *Digital Format: WAV & MP3*
- *Transcript file: OHTC_2020-10-22_Cady-Melissa_Transcript*
 - *Digital Format: PDF*
- *Recorded as part of the 2020-2021 Voices That Must Be Heard - Oral History Project*

Regina DiOrio (00:16:31)

DiOrio talks about her early education, and what prompted her to begin work towards becoming a Drug and Alcohol Counselor. Regina discusses her work with CAPCO (Cortland County Community Action Program). DiOrio discusses

the benefits of being a CODY counselor (a group of middle man counselors that work with Family and Children's Services of Cortland County).

Trigger Warnings: Substance abuse

- *Recorded: 10/29/20*
- *Name of Interviewer: Melissa Cady*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2020-10-29_DiOrio-Regina*
 - *Digital Format: WAV & MP3*
- *Transcript file: OHTC_2020-10-29_DiOrio-Regina_Transcript*
 - *Digital Format: PDF*
- *Recorded as part of the 2020-2021 Voices That Must Be Heard - Oral History Project*

Danielle Drake (00:35:53)

Drake begins with a discussion about her childhood and relationship with Ithaca/Tompkins County. She then delves into her experiences with regional drug courts, rehabilitation, and counseling; this includes some criticism of systems she has interacted with. Drake contemplates her hopes for the future, and the lessons she has learned.

Trigger Warnings: Postpartum complications, mental health, substance abuse, description of Child Protective Services investigative actions, addiction

- *Recorded: 10/22/20*
- *Name of Interviewer: Tony Sidle*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2020-10-22_Drake-Danielle*
 - *Digital Format: WAV & MP3*
- *Transcript file: OHTC_2020-10-22_Drake-Danielle_Transcript*
 - *Digital Format: PDF*
- *Recorded as part of the 2020-2021 Voices That Must Be Heard - Oral History Project*

Ricardo Escobedo (00:46:36)

Escobedo reminisces about his childhood in North Texas, the way events such as his parents divorce, and a brief time in juvenile detention shaped him, and what brought him to Ithaca in his early twenties. He discusses his education, plans for a future career, and his hopes for a five year plan. Escobedo also talks about the people that inspired him, and how those influences have helped form his hobbies, dreams, and ideas of the future.

Trigger Warnings: Body image, bullying, mental health

- *Recorded: 10/22/2020*
- *Name of Interviewer: Michael James*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2020-10-29_Escobedo-Ricardo*
 - *Digital Format: WAV & MP3*
- *Transcript file: OHTC_2020-10-29_Escobedo-Ricardo_Transcript*
 - *Digital Format: PDF*

- *Recorded as part of the 2020-2021 Voices That Must Be Heard - Oral History Project*

Sunshine Fox (00:54:35)

Born in Canandaigua, Sunshine grew up in a foster home which she left at 16. She talks about training to become a licensed massage therapist and the importance of human connection, both spiritual and physical, for her own sense of well-being. She talks about the challenges of raising children in the face of technology addictions and uncertainty about the future, and shares her hopes for her children as they grow older.

- *Recorded: 4/8/2021*
- *Name of Interviewer: Michael James*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2021-4-8_Fox-Sunshine*
 - *Digital Format: WAV & MP3*
- *Transcript file: OHTC_2021-4-8_Fox-Sunshine_Transcript*
 - *Digital Format: PDF*
- *Recorded as part of the 2020-2021 Voices That Must Be Heard - Oral History Project*

Jo-Louis Hallback (Part One) (00:47:39)

Originally hailing from Lakeland, Florida, Hallback moved to Ithaca in 2017. Taken away from his mother as an infant by Child Protection Services, Jo-Louis was raised by his aunt alongside two cousins. He reflects on his experiences of institutionalized racism, including being stopped and searched by police along with his cousins as a young man, and how ingrained assumptions of what Black men are ‘supposed’ to be limited his confidence when it came to future ambitions. He also talks about his love of music and a newfound interest in foreign languages.

Trigger Warnings: Descriptions of gun violence and incarceration. Occasional strong language.

- *Recorded: 10/22/2020*
- *Name of Interviewer: Amy Heffron*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2020-10-29_Hallback-Jo-Louis*
 - *Digital Format: WAV & MP3*
- *Transcript file: OHTC_2020-10-29_Hallback-Jo-Louis_Transcript*
 - *Digital Format: PDF*
- *Recorded as part of the 2020-2021 Voices That Must Be Heard - Oral History Project*

Jo-Louis Hallback (Part Two) (00:41:44)

In the second part of his interview, this time conducted by Lucas Hahn, Hallback talks about the people that helped him out of illegal work and guided him toward being a more responsible community member. He also talks about the lifestyle changes he experimented with that helped him feel healthier, both physically and mentally, and which eased his transition to a more consistent lifestyle.

Trigger Warnings: Descriptions of substance abuse, homelessness, and oblique references to illegal activity.

- *Recorded: 11/11/2020*
- *Name of Interviewer: Lucas Hahn*
- *Audio File: OHTC_11-11-20_Hallback-Jo-Louis*
 - *Digital Format: WAV & MP3*
- *Transcript file: OHTC_11-11-20_Hallback-Jo-Louis_Transcript*
 - *Digital Format: PDF*
- *Recorded as part of the 2020-2021 Voices That Must Be Heard - Oral History Project*

Amy Heffron (00:44:45)

Heffron discusses what it was like to grow up in central New York, and the influence of her late grandfather. She compares the parenting dynamic differences between her grandfather and her father, and how both affected her own parenting style. Heffron talks about her experiences in getting sober, returning to school, and having children. She talks about her hopes for a future career, and her reasons for participating in this oral history project.

Trigger Warnings: Substance abuse, probation, sobriety, incarceration

- *Recorded: 11/05/2020*
- *Name of Interviewer: Lucas Hahn*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2020-11-5_Heffron-Amy*
 - *Digital Format: WAV & MP3*
- *Transcript file: OHTC_2020-11-5_Heffron-Amy_Transcript*
 - *Digital Format: PDF*
- *Recorded as part of the 2020-2021 Voices That Must Be Heard - Oral History Project*

Michael James (00:54:59)

Per request of the interviewee, this oral history is only available for listening in person at our Research Library.

James discusses the events of his childhood that resulted in him moving away for several years. He talks about his teenage years, joining the military, and the events that led to his expulsion. He discusses the traumatic events of his life and how they led him to substance abuse, and eventually to sobriety. He also talks about his family, returning to school, and his hopes and plans for the future.

Trigger Warnings: Substance abuse, descriptions of domestic violence, parental abuse, mention of the events of 9/11, addiction, suicide, sobriety (and struggles with it)

- *Recorded: 10/29/2020*
- *Name of Interviewer: Ricardo Escobedo*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2020-10-29_James-Michael*
 - *Digital Format: WAV & MP3*
- *Transcript file: OHTC_2020-10-29_James-Michael_Transcript*
 - *Digital Format: PDF*

- *Recorded as part of the 2020-2021 Voices That Must Be Heard - Oral History Project*

Latoya Peterson (00:44:30)

Peterson opens her interview by discussing her childhood and complicated educational background, including her attendance to several colleges for multiple degrees. When the interview was conducted she was working towards a Bachelors of Science in Addiction Services. A single mother, Peterson describes her struggles to balance education, work, and parenting. She discusses her desire to own a home, finish her degree, and receive her real estate license.

Trigger Warnings: Mention of multiple motor vehicle accidents, discussion of friends experience of drug addiction

- *Recorded: 03/25/2021*
- *Name of Interviewer: Amy Heffron*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2021-3-25_Peterson-Latoya*
 - *Digital Format: WAV & MP3*
- *Transcript file: OHTC_2021-3-25_Peterson-Latoya_Transcript*
 - *Digital Format: PDF*
- *Recorded as part of the 2020-2021 Voices That Must Be Heard - Oral History Project*

Casandra Ponton (00:48:07)

Casandra Ponton reflects on moving from Colorado to Ithaca at 11-years-old. Her struggles with depression and anxiety, overcoming a drug addiction, and building a steady life after rehab. Ponton discusses a love for tending horses on the family ranch in Colorado, a passion for forensic science and theater, the fears and joys of motherhood, and the fulfillment from working with organizations like Criminal Justice/Alternatives to Incarceration Board and Challenge Workforce Solutions.

Trigger Warnings: Addiction, adult language, rehabilitation, self harm, substance abuse

- *Recorded: 2/25/2021*
- *Name of Interviewer: Amy Heffron*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2021-2-23_Ponton-Casandra*
 - *Digital Format: WAV & MP3*
- *Transcript file: OHTC_2021-2-23_Ponton-Casandra_Transcript*
 - *Digital Format: PDF*
- *Recorded as part of the 2020-2021 Voices That Must Be Heard - Oral History Project*

Antony Sidle (00:23:02)

Sidle begins his interview by discussing what brought him and his family to the area; this includes mentioning all the places around the country that he lived as a young adult. In his mention of time spent in Portland, Oregon, he discusses the legalization of personal possession of drugs and drug paraphernalia. He describes the work he has done with programs such as Challenge Workforce Solutions, Civic Ensemble, and the ReEntry Theatre Program. Sidle discusses his

educational background, and hopes to open a community style living program such as Oxford House.

Trigger Warnings: Substance abuse, addiction, rehabilitation, incarceration

- *Recorded: 11/05/2020*
- *Name of Interviewer: Danielle Drake*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2020-11-5_Sidle*
 - *Digital Format: WAV & MP3*
- *Transcript file: OHTC_2020-11-5_Sidle-Antony_Transcript*
 - *Digital Format: PDF*
- *Recorded as part of the 2020-2021 Voices That Must Be Heard - Oral History Project*

CITATION FOR THE COLLECTION

“Voices That Must Be Heard” Oral History Project, thirteen oral histories recorded between February 2020-March 2021 by members of Civic Ensemble’s ReEntry Theatre Program, The History Center in Tompkins County. Oral Histories of Tompkins County Audio Archives, Ithaca, NY, 2021.

Recording this project was a collaboration of Civic Ensemble’s ReEntry Theatre Program and College Initiative Upstate.



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Generous support for starting the archiving of this project came from a two year grant from the Museum Association of New York and the Institute of Museum & Library Services between 2020-2022.



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