

Oral Histories of Tompkins County

Archival Finding Aid

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Stories of Immigration to Tompkins County: Oral History Collection

The *Stories of Immigration to Tompkins County Oral History Collection* was established in 2021 to highlight interviews and stories in our archives that explore the experiences of first generation immigrants to Tompkins County and the United States, and their descendants. The topics of these interviews explore a wide range of experiences, community, and cultures. The stories shared may have been guided by the specific project the interview was recorded for. This collection will continue to expand as our Oral History archives continue to grow.

Trigger warning(s): violent imagery, war, descriptions of state-sanctioned violence, poverty, antisemitism, Holocaust, Nazis, death, gun violence, starvation, white supremacy.

We are still processing this collection, and are creating accompanying transcripts and listing details for each interview.

Interviews with:

Akua Akyea* (15 minutes)

Akua Akyea reflects on her childhood spent in Africa, Western Europe, and Canada and the lifelong connection with food that led her to opening Mama Loye's Cafe in Dryden. She also discusses her personal philosophy of the importance of growth and trying things outside of her comfort zone.

Trigger warning(s): war, descriptions of state sanctioned violence

- *Recorded 4/27/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-4-27_Akyea-Akua*
- *Transcript File: TR_OHTC_2019-4-27_Akyea-Akua*
- *Recorded as part of the Immigration & Food Project in 2019.*

Abner Argueta* (25 minutes)

Abner Argueta discusses his childhood in Guatemala and the process of immigrating to the United States, where he worked in California and Oregon before opening Argueta's Coffee in Ithaca. He also reflects on his lifelong dream of owning a coffee farm where he can grow and sell his own coffee.

Trigger warning(s): poverty, war

- *Recorded 5/16/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-5-16_Argueta-Abner*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2019-5-16_Argueta-Abner*
- *Recorded as part of the Immigration & Food Project in 2019.*

Rose Bethe (11 minutes)

Rose speaks about her experiences as a teenager in Stuttgart in the 1930s, as she was shunned by friends in the classroom, and the laws in Germany changed, requiring her family to flee. She came alone to the U.S. and worked as a “scullery maid” before being admitted to Smith College and continuing her education.

Trigger warning(s): antisemitism, violent imagery, Nazis, Holocaust

- *Recorded: Date unknown*
- *Audio File: OHTC_Bethe-Rose*
- *Recorded as part of the Oral History of Holocaust Survivors Project.*

Tal Oron Cohen* (50 minutes)

Tal Oron Cohen discusses spending time in Israel, Denmark, and New Mexico before coming to Ithaca in 2006. She reflects on running her business, Ba-Li Cravings, building a commercial kitchen in her basement, and her experience as an immigrant in the United States.

Trigger warning: war

- *Recorded 4/20/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-4-20_Cohen-Tal-Oron*
- *Transcript: TR_OHTC_2019-4-20_Cohen-Tal-Oron*
- *Recorded as part of the Immigration & Food Project in 2019.*

Ann Erlich (19 minutes)

Ann Erlich speaks about her life as a child of Holocaust survivors. Born in a DP camp in Mittenwald, Germany, Ann is the oldest child of a young couple whose large Polish Jewish families were destroyed by the Nazis. Ann explains how, when she was young, her parents did not talk about their past and focused all their energy on making a new life in America. Their luck in being sponsored by an American soldier, who almost forgot about them when they got off the boat, showed the complete trust that the young refugees had in a kind stranger who eventually became a friend. Ann tells stories of the network of relationships that were needed just to find a place to live and the reliance her parents had on her as a young girl who could translate English to Yiddish when they struggled to get settled.

Trigger warning(s): antisemitism, Holocaust

- *Recorded 2/2017*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2017-2_Erlich-Ann*
- *Recorded as part of the Oral History of Holocaust Survivors Project in 2017.*

Eniko Farkas*

Eniko Farkas reflects on her childhood in Hungary, where she witnessed the Hungarian Revolution and resented the Communist regime. She discusses how she began embroidering and her career as a teacher of Hungarian embroidery in Ithaca, as well as the prejudice Hungarian immigrants have faced in the United States.

Trigger warning: violent imagery

- *Recorded 10/25/2017*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2017-10-25_Farkas-Eniko*
- *Transcript File: TR_OHTC_2017-10-25_Farkas-Eniko*
- *Recorded as part of the Cornell Anthropology 1900 Project in 2017.*

Addisu Gebre* (54 minutes)

Addisu Gebre discusses opening Enat Ethiopian Cuisine, a business that sells at the Ithaca Farmers Market and caters in Ithaca, with his wife. He also speaks on his education in Ethiopia and at Cornell University and his work in both countries as an engineer.

- *Recorded 4/20/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-4-20_Gebre-Addisu*
- *Transcript: TR_OHTC_2019-4-20_Gebre-Addisu*
- *Recorded as part of the Immigration & Food Project in 2019.*

Kurt Gottfried (18 minutes)

Kurt was born in 1929 in Vienna to a family originating in Romania and Poland. Although he had a doctorate in Chemistry, Kurt's father was unable to find work as a scientist in Austria due to anti-Semitism. Instead, he started a small company in the small apartment where the family lived, manufacturing ski-bindings. Kurt attended an integrated school (Jews and non-Jews) on the grounds of the Schonbrunn Summer Palace in Vienna. After Hitler annexed Austria (the Anschluss), Kurt attended a segregated school (Jews only) in another neighborhood. He recalls the Kristallnacht as Nazi's rifled through and stole their precious belongings. Soon after, the family left Vienna by train to Cologne, Germany and paid a smuggler to get them across the Dutch-German border and then to Antwerp in Belgium. They were in Antwerp for about 8 months, while Kurt's father tried to make arrangements to leave Europe. In August 1939, they were able to leave for Montreal, Canada, where a colleague of Kurt's father, who was in the ski-binding business sponsored them. Kurt spent the rest of his teenage years in Montreal, and went on to become a world-renowned physicist and human rights activist.

Trigger warning(s): antisemitism, violent imagery, Nazis, Holocaust

- *Recorded 5/2016*

- *Audio File: OHTC_2016-5_Gottfried-Kurt*
- *Recorded as part of the Oral History of Holocaust Survivors Project in 2016.*

Adil Griguihi* (7 minutes)

Adil Griguihi reflects on the transition from attending college in Morocco to moving to the United States to find work. He discusses the difficulties of starting and maintaining his restaurant, Casablanca, in downtown Ithaca, and the positive experiences he has had with it.

- *Recorded 4/17/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-4-17_Griguihi-Adil*
- *Transcript: TR_OHTC_2019-4-17_Griguihi-Adil*
- *Recorded as part of the Immigration & Food Project in 2019.*

Ooy and Bonner Herren* (27 minutes)

Ooy Herren discusses her business ventures in Thailand, including a gas station and a bakery, and her restaurant in Ithaca, Thai Basil. She also discusses the time-intensive nature of owning a small business and the difficulties that the language barrier has imposed.

- *Recorded 5/5/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-5-5_Herren-Ooy-and-Bonner*
- *Transcript: TR_OHTC_2019-5-5_Herren-Ooy-and-Bonner*
- *Recorded as part of the Immigration & Food Project in 2019.*

Roald Hoffmann (30 minutes)

Roald Hoffmann speaks about the war-time circumstances of his life as a young child in the small town of Złoczów in Eastern Poland. Born into a happy and loving extended family, he and his parents were imprisoned in a forced labor camp beginning with the Nazi invasion of Russia in 1941. As the risks to their lives became more severe, he and his mother, and several family members found a place to hide in the attic of a school-house in a nearby town. Roald describes the conditions of the hide-out, and the enormous risks taken on by the school teacher and his wife who hid them. Ultimately, it was the moral actions of his family's rescuers that saved their lives.

Trigger warning(s): antisemitism, violent imagery, Nazis, Holocaust, gun violence, death

- *Recorded 2/2017*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2017-2_Hoffmann-Roald*
- *Recorded as part of the Oral History of Holocaust Survivors Project in 2017.*

Dr. Abdul Jalil* (34 minutes)

Dr. Abdul Jalil discusses his education in Bangladesh and Japan, employment as a scientist in several countries, and work at Cornell University. He also discusses his role in Ithaca's Muslim community and his business, Ithaca Halal Meat and Grocery.

- *Recorded 4/15/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-4-15_Jalil-Abdul-Dr*
- *Transcript File: TR_OHTC_2019-4-15_Jalil-Abdul-Dr*
- *This transcript is awaiting verification.*
- *Recorded as part of the Immigration & Food Project in 2019.*

Katherine Karakantas* (22 minutes)

Katherine Karakantas reflects on the diner that her parents owned as Greek immigrants in Ithaca during the twentieth century. She discusses her role in the diner as a teenager, the Greek tradition of opening diners in the United States, and the evolution of social and restaurant culture in Ithaca.

- *Recorded 6/21/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-6-21_Karakantas-Katherine*
- *Transcript: TR_OHTC_2019-6-21_Karakantas-Katherine*
- *Recorded as part of the Immigration & Food Project in 2019.*

Noemi Kraut (16 minutes)

Noemi Kraut was born in Antwerp, Belgium into a Jewish family of active Zionists who worked in the diamond trade. After the invasion of Belgium by the Germans in 1940, Noemi's parents planned their escape from Antwerp to London, England. They left Antwerp with two small suitcases and young Noemi to the coast of Belgium where they got rides on military trucks crossing into France. Travelling up and down the coast of Belgium and France they were looking for a ship that would take them to England. Ultimately, an Egyptian sailor took pity on them, and convinced his captain to allow them to board a freighter destined for the U.S.. Noemi and her parents disembarked in England where they lived until the war was over.

- *Recorded 4/2017*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2016-5_Kraut-Noemi*
- *Recorded as part of the Oral History of Holocaust Survivors Project in 2017.*

Bill Manos*

Bill Manos discusses his immigration to Des Moines, Iowa, from Greece at the age of nine in 1947, experience as a restaurant owner, and appreciation for Ithaca. He also speaks about his wish for Ithaca to become a larger city and his approval of its progress in that direction.

- *Recorded 10/25/2017*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2017-10-25_Manos-Bill*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2017-10-25_Manos-Bill*
- *Recorded as part of the Cornell Anthropology 1900 Project in 2017.*

Gus "Dino" Marinos

Dino Marinos discusses his childhood in Greece during the Nazi occupation and Greek Civil War and his story of immigration to the United States, where his family first settled in Pennsylvania. He also speaks on his family, his career as a hairdresser, and the Greek presence in Ithaca.

Trigger warning(s): Nazis, starvation, violent imagery

- *Recorded 10/25/2017*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2017-10-25_Marinos-Dino*
- *Transcript File: TR_OHTC_2017-10-25_Marinos-Dino*
- *Recorded as part of the Cornell Anthropology 1900 Project in 2017.*

Louise Matosich

- *Recorded as part of the Generation to Generation Project in 2016.*

Edward & Michael Mazza* (43 minutes)

Ed and Michael speak to the life of Ed's grandparents, who founded Ithaca Bakery, a bar room, a grocery store, and a dance hall as Italian immigrants in Ithaca. They speak to the hard work that has been a centerpiece of their family values and how it has shaped them and the memories that have been passed down from generation to generation.

- *Recorded 4/10/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-4-10_Mazza-Edward-and-Michael*
- *Transcript: OHTC_2019-4-10_Mazza-Edward-and-Michael*
- *Recorded as part of the Immigration & Food Project in 2019.*

Leslyn McBean-Clairborne* (44 minutes)

Leslyn McBean-Clairborne discusses how her passion for teaching and equity took her from working in the Ithaca City School District to working as a case worker and trainer to working with the Southside Community Center and Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC). She also speaks to her personal philosophy of equity and justice.

Trigger warning: white supremacy

- *Recorded 10/24/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-10-24_McBean-Clairborne-Leslyn*
- *Transcript File: TR_OHTC_2019-10-24_McBean-Clairborne-Leslyn*
- *Recorded as part of the Local Sisters of Change Project in 2019.*

Mimi Melegrito* (61 minutes) (2018)

Mimi Melegrito discusses her childhood in the Philippines and the story of how she immigrated to the United States. She reflects on her first memories of the US, the story of how she met her husband and moved to Ithaca, and her work in Ithaca as a volunteer in nursing homes, food banks, and local 4-H youth clubs and programs.

Trigger warning: violent imagery

- *Recorded 3/2018*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2018-Melegrito-Mimi*
- *Transcript File: TR_OHTC_2018-Melegrito-Mimi*
- *Recorded as part of the Generation to Generation Project in 2018.*

Mimi Melegrito* (2017)

Mimi Melegrito (recorded in 2017): Mimi Melegrito discusses working with teenagers at GIAC since the 1980s and her efforts to resolve conflicts among these teenagers, often dealing with issues of racial prejudice and substance use. She also discusses her mission of improving people's lives and her observations about housing discrimination in Ithaca.

Trigger warning: violent imagery

- *Recorded 10/25/2017*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2017-10-25_Melegrito-Mimi*
- *Transcript File: TR_OHTC_2017-10-25_Melegrito-Mimi*
- *Recorded as part of the Cornell Anthropology 1900 Project in 2017.*

June Morse (6/15/2018 - 58 minutes) (10/18/2018 - 51 minutes)*

June Morse discusses her youth in England during WWII, career teaching in England, Germany, and Syracuse, and moving to New York with her husband to settle in Ithaca. She also discusses her impressions of class in England and the United States, Ithaca's development as a city, and Cornell's contribution to culture in Ithaca.

Trigger warning(s): war, description of bombs falling

- *Recorded 6/15/2018.*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2018-6-15_Morse-June*
- *Recorded as part of the Generation to Generation Project in 2018.*

- *Recorded 10/18/2018*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2018-10-18_Morse-June*
- *Transcript File: TR_OHTC_2018-10-18_Morse-June*
- *Recorded as part of the Cornell Anthropology 1900 Project in 2018.*

Martha Preston*

Martha Preston discusses her Greek heritage, including the store her great-grandfather opened in Connecticut and later relocated to Ithaca, which was run by her grandparents. She speaks on her experience in the Greek community in Ithaca, from Greek dances to the Greek Orthodox church that opened in 1966.

- *Recorded 10/25/2017*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2017-10-25_Preston-Martha*
- *Transcript File: TR_OHTC_2017-10-25_Preston-Martha*
- *Recorded as part of the Cornell Anthropology 1900 Project in 2017.*

Maria Rabb (19 minutes)

Maria is interviewed by her daughter and grand-daughter in Ithaca about her experience as a 10 year old girl whose family hid a Jewish family in their home on the outskirts of Budapest near the end of the war. Maria's father owned a shoe shop for making custom shoes, and his Jewish employee, Ede Hajos, asked Maria's father to look after his wife, daughters and sister while he was sent to a labor camp. Maria's mother and aunt took in eight members of the family

altogether, and Maria recalls what the conditions were like in their home, as the Germans invaded Hungary in October 1944, and the fascist Arrow Cross party took over the country. Ede Hajos did not return to his family, but everyone else in his family survived thanks to the courage of Maria's mother and aunt. In 2011 at the Israeli consulate in New York city, Maria received a Righteous of the Nations award from Yad Vashem in recognition of her family's bravery.
Trigger warning(s): antisemitism, Holocaust, Nazis, violent imagery, death

- *Recorded: - Date Unknown - est. 2014 or 2015*
- *Audio File: OHTC_Rabb-Maria*
- *Recorded as part of the Oral History of Holocaust Survivors Project.*

Patricia Rodriguez* (34 minutes)

Patricia Rodriguez, an Associate Professor of Political Science, discusses her upbringing in Chile and Brazil and its influence on her interests and areas of study, which focus on social movements and political systems in Latin America. She reports on her research on *campesinos* in Colombia and her work with the Tompkins County Immigrant Rights Coalition.

- *Recorded 10/24/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-10-24_Rodriguez-Patricia*
- *Transcript File: TR_OHTC_2019-10-24_Rodriguez-Patricia*
- *Recorded as part of the Local Sisters of Change Project in 2019.*

Mary Salton (26 minutes)

Mary tells the story of growing up in Vienna to Austrian parents surrounded by a large extended family including her mother's sisters and both sets of grandparents. She recalls seeing Hitler in person in a parade with her nanny, and tells how the SS came looking for her father at his office, and he cleverly avoided being arrested. At that point, Mary and her parents were forced to leave Austria, and did so legally as they were lucky to have recently acquired passports. Mary then recounts the sequence of events by which she and her parents were able to cross the border into Italy without any money, and without her grandparents and eventually ended up in Switzerland, where they lived until 1948 when their American visa number finally came through. Many members of Mary's extended family perished as they left Vienna to go to France and Belgium from where they were deported. She and her parents came to New York city where Mary studied English and qualified to get into went to Hunter College. She married Gerald Salton, a fellow refugee who came to Cornell, and she raised two children in Ithaca.

Trigger warning: antisemitism, Nazis, Holocaust, death

- *Recorded 2/2016*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2016-2_Salton-Mary*
- *Recorded as part of the Oral History of Holocaust Survivors Project in 2016.*

Baldev and Kamaldeep Sekhon* (61 minutes)

Baldev and Kamaldeep Sekhon discuss moving from Punjab, India, to the United States, where Baldev first worked in agriculture in California, then in construction in New York City, before opening New Delhi Diamond's restaurant in Ithaca. They reflect on the downsides to being disconnected from their family and friends in India and discuss traditional family structures and activities where they grew up.

- *Recorded 4/23/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-4-23_Sekhon-Baldev-and-Kamaldeep*
- *Transcript: TR_OHTC_2019-4-23_Sekhon-Baldev-and-Kamaldeep*
- *Recorded as part of the Immigration & Food Project in 2019.*

Rachel Siegel (18 minutes)

Rachel speaks about her family and how they escaped from Germany before the Holocaust. Rachel's parents had weathered wars and the Russian revolution while living in Lithuania. They moved to Berlin in the early 1920s for safety. Rachel was born in Berlin, and at the age of 6, her father uprooted the family once again to move to Lausanne, Switzerland where she went to school. She speaks about the life that her family led leading up to the war in the neutral country of Switzerland and finally moving to the U.S. as immigrants in 1939. Rachel's parents, driven by fear and worry managed to save the lives of their whole extended family. Rachel Siegel passed away at the age of 91 on February 21, 2016.

Trigger warning(s): antisemitism, Holocaust

- *Recorded 2/2015*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2015-2_Siegel-Rachel*
- *Recorded as part of the Oral History of Holocaust Survivors Project in 2015.*

Amy Somchanhmavong* (53 minutes)

Amy Somchanhmavong speaks on the intersection of creating a space for Asian American studies in academia and connecting this pursuit to community engagement. She reflects on leading the push for the establishment of the Asian American Studies program in Binghamton University and, upon moving to Ithaca, becoming involved with various community-based organizations in order to apply this work.

- *Recorded 10/24/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-10-24_Somchanhmavong-Amy*
- *Transcript File: TR_OHTC_2019-10-24_Somchanhmavong-Amy*
- *Recorded as part of the Local Sisters of Change Project in 2019.*

Fred Voss (Part 1 - 18 minutes) (Part 2 - 15 minutes)

Fred talks about growing up in Aachen in Germany before the Nazi's came to power. During the following six years, Fred's family struggled to make a life for themselves, until the Kristallnacht. Fred was beaten by members of the Hitler

Youth and forbidden from going to school. The family home and textile store were destroyed and his father was sent to a concentration camp for two months. In exchange for everything they owned, Fred's mother arranged an exit visa to England, and they eventually made it to the U.S. In his second interview, Fred discusses his army service in World War II.

Trigger warning(s): antisemitism, Holocaust, violent imagery, Nazis, war, death

- *Recorded 5/2015*
- *Audio File(s): OHTC_2015-4_Voss-Fred Part 1, OHTC_2015-4_Voss-Fred Part 2*
- *Recorded as part of the Oral History of Holocaust Survivors Project in 2015.*

Ilse Voss (20 minutes)

Ilse Voss speaks about her family life in a small town outside Vienna prior to Hitler's annexation of Austria. She describes how her family was evicted from their home and lived in the empty Rabbi's apartment in the local synagogue. On Kristallnacht, the Nazis searched the apartment, forced them to leave and the synagogue was set on fire. Ilse and her mother left for England to work as a maid and au pair. Both Ilse's father and 12 year old brother were deported.

Trigger warning(s): antisemitism, Holocaust, Nazis, death, war

- *Recorded 2/2015*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2015-2_Voss-Ilse*
- *Recorded as part of the Oral History of Holocaust Survivors Project in 2015.*

Marion Wimpfheimer (22 minutes)

Marion Joseph Wimpfheimer recounts the life of her family as wine-makers in Osthofen, a small town in the Rhineland of Germany. When the Nazis prevented non-Jews from working for Jews, Marion's family was forced to leave the winery behind. They were hoping to get visas to the U.S., but were rounded up in Mannheim and sent to Rivesalte and Gurs in Vichy France. After struggling to find food and survive there, her parents, her brother and Marion were sent to a transit camp in Marseille (her mother at the Center Bompard and her father at Camp des Milles) only to find out that their U.S. visas had expired. At that point when she was 12 years old, Marion's parents were deported to Poland, and she was sent to live in a Chateau near Limoges with other girls by OSE - (Œuvre de secours aux enfants -- a children's aid organization). When the Nazi's occupied Vichy France, Marion went into hiding with an elderly French couple who wanted to adopt her. After the war her brother, who was in hiding on a nearby farm, reunited with her and arranged for the two of them to emigrate to the U.S., when Marion was 16. She finished high school at night in New York, married there, and has two daughters and four grandchildren. Marion lives in Ithaca where she and her husband retired to be near family.

Trigger warning(s): antisemitism, Holocaust

- *Recorded 5/2016*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2016-5-Wimpfheimer-Marion*
- *Recorded as part of the Oral History of Holocaust Survivors Project in 2016.*

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