
How to Create an Oral History Program

MARAC
April 2016

Outline

Getting Started

-Kelsey Duinkerken-
Thomas Jefferson University

The Interview

-Devin McKinney-
Gettysburg College

After the Interview

-Jenny Swadosh-
The New School

Getting Started

-Kelsey Duinkerken-
Thomas Jefferson University

- defining your focus
 - doing preliminary research
 - developing questions
 - working with irb
 - creating a release form
 - choosing a recorder
-

defining your focus

- What is the main topic that will be explored?
 - What is the scope of your oral history project? What questions will you ask?
- Why is the project worth doing?
 - How will these oral histories supplement the archival record? Is this information available elsewhere?
- What products will result from the project?
 - Will there be audio or video recordings? Do you have the time or money for transcription? Where will the completed materials be stored? How will people access the oral histories?

defining your focus

what is the focus
of your proposed
oral history project?

doing preliminary research

- Research your topic, time period, movements, population, context
 - Be an expert about the subject
- Create list of individuals to contact
 - How many? What geographic parameters? Are you traveling to them?
- Read up on oral history practices and techniques
 - The more, the better!

developing questions

- Create a list of core questions that will guide your interview
- Broad, open-ended questions - avoid leading questions
- Only one question at a time - avoid multi-part
- Think about the structure and flow of interview
- Don't have too many - you'll add in follow-up questions and probes in the moment

working with irb

From the Oral History Association:

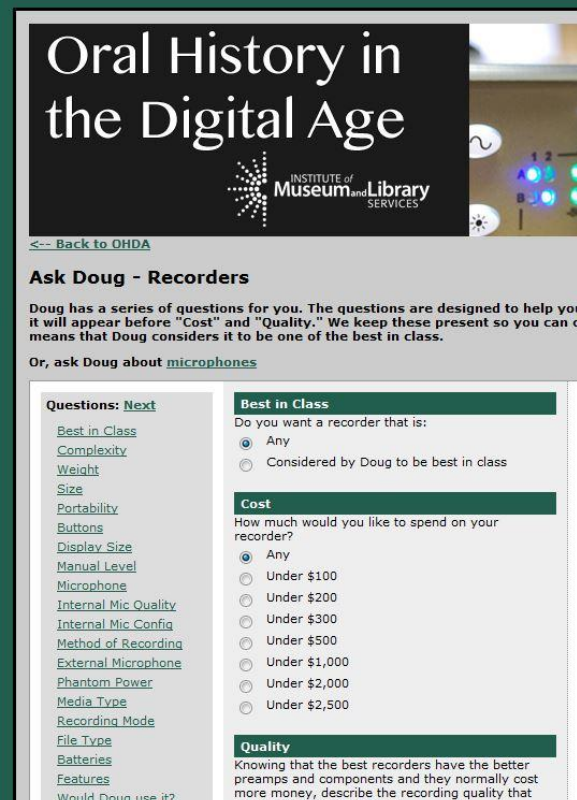
“On September 8, 2015, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services... recommended that oral history be explicitly excluded from review by institutional review boards (IRBs), noting that oral history already has its own code of ethics, including the principle of informed consent.”

creating a release form

- Who will hold the copyright?
- How will the audio/video and transcript be used?
- Does the repository or institution have the right to publish material from the oral histories?
- Where will the resulting materials be stored? The Archives? Could they be de-accessioned?
- Can the oral histories be put on the Internet (and any successor technologies or future media)?
- Are there access restrictions?

choosing a recorder

- How much money do you want to spend?
- Video or audio recording?
- Does it create uncompressed WAV files?
- Will you be traveling with it?
- What is your level of expertise?



Oral History in the Digital Age

INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

[<-- Back to OHDA](#)

Ask Doug - Recorders

Doug has a series of questions for you. The questions are designed to help you choose a recorder that will appear before "Cost" and "Quality." We keep these present so you can compare. This means that Doug considers it to be one of the best in class.

Or, ask Doug about [microphones](#)

Questions: [Next](#)

- [Best in Class](#)
- [Complexity](#)
- [Weight](#)
- [Size](#)
- [Portability](#)
- [Buttons](#)
- [Display Size](#)
- [Manual Level](#)
- [Microphone](#)
- [Internal Mic Quality](#)
- [Internal Mic Config](#)
- [Method of Recording](#)
- [External Microphone](#)
- [Phantom Power](#)
- [Media Type](#)
- [Recording Mode](#)
- [File Type](#)
- [Batteries](#)
- [Features](#)
- [Would Doug use it?](#)

Best in Class

Do you want a recorder that is:

- Any
- Considered by Doug to be best in class

Cost

How much would you like to spend on your recorder?

- Any
- Under \$100
- Under \$200
- Under \$300
- Under \$500
- Under \$1,000
- Under \$2,000
- Under \$2,500

Quality

Knowing that the best recorders have the better preamps and components and they normally cost more money, describe the recording quality that you want with this recorder.

<http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/askdoug/>

The Interview

-Devin McKinney-
Gettysburg College

- making contact
 - conditions + location
 - what to bring
 - interview tips + techniques
-

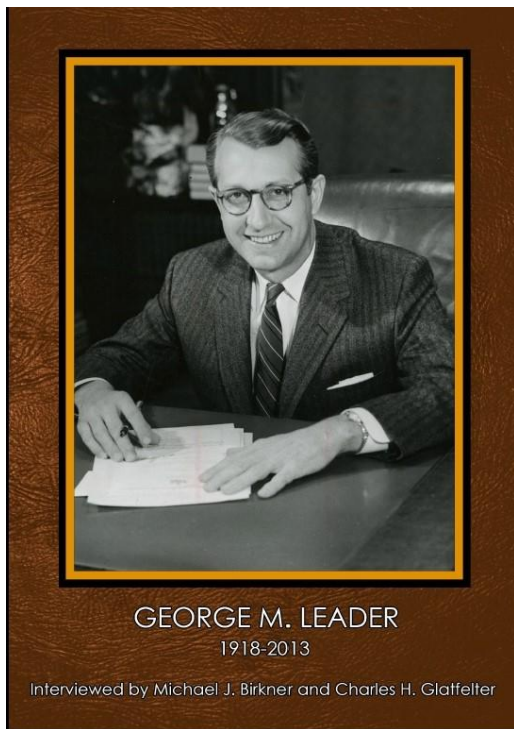
introduction

people, not platforms

introduction

the learning curve

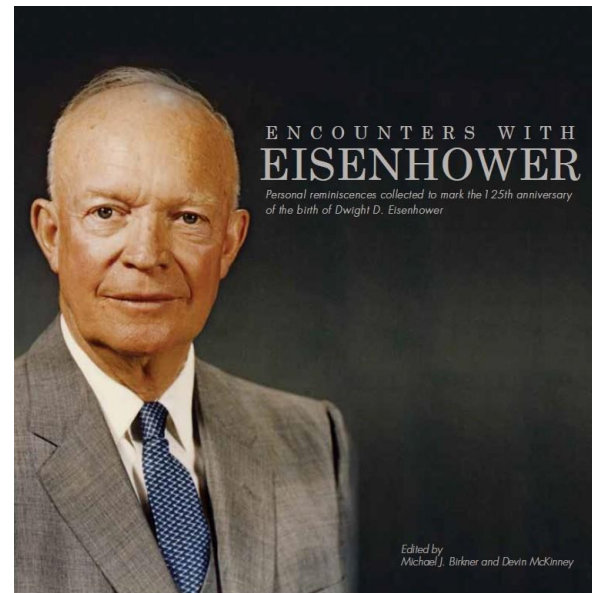
Publications from the Gettysburg College/ Musselman Library Oral History Collection



George M. Leader (1918-2013)



Voices from D-Day: June 6, 1944



Encounters with Eisenhower

making contact

Choose the best method for the person

- Email
- Telephone
- Letter

crafting the request

The subject line

- Make it specific to the person

The request

- Be humble
- Give detail + background on yourself / your project / your institution
- Stress the person's importance
- Schedule to their convenience
- Provide contact information
- Say thank you

state your conditions

- Control of questioning
- Personal or painful subjects
- Other considerations

determine the location

The person's home

- Must be quiet, distraction-free

Your institution

- Quiet, controlled space
 - Conference/study room
 - Office

By telephone

- Same principles apply

what to bring

- Digital recorder
 - Backup batteries
- Printed questions
- Notebook
- Pens/pencils
- Timepiece
- Water (if your institution)
- 2 copies of release

interview tips and techniques

Begin by stating facts for the record

- Your name
- Date
- Location
- Subject's name
- Project name / subject matter

interview tips and techniques

ask your questions,
don't read them

interview tips and techniques

okay to suggest answers
— IF you have to

interview tips and techniques

check off questions
as you go

interview tips and techniques

check your device
occasionally

interview tips and techniques

Other types of recording devices

- Digital camera
- Video recorder

interview tips and techniques

multi-task

interview tips and techniques

Use affirmations

- Vocal (“Yes,” “Right,” “Sure,” “Mm-hmm”)
- Physical (nodding, smiling, laughing)

interview tips and techniques

Follow the chemistry of the encounter

- Modify or disregard guidelines, if necessary
- Don't force the chemistry — let them determine it

interview tips and techniques

suppress yourself

interview tips and techniques

Care about the interview, even if they don't

- Be professional
- Follow through

interview tips and techniques

Bring the release

- 2 copies, both signed and dated by you
 - 1 for you
 - 1 for the person

interview tips and techniques

remember:
you're doing
something important

interview tips and techniques

develop
— and trust —
your intuitions

After the Interview

-Jenny Swadosh-
The New School

- management
 - audio editing + preservation
 - transcription
 - description
 - access
 - promotion + outreach
-

Management of Oral History Collections

From the OHA's *Principles and Best Practices for Oral History*:

“Interviewers should document their preparation and methods, including the circumstances of the interviews and provide that information to whatever repository will be preserving and providing access to the interview.”

Management of Oral History Collections

document everything!

Management of Oral History Collections

establish **who** is responsible
for **what**, **when** they need to
do it, and **how** it should be done.

Management of Oral History Collections

Establish file
naming
protocols and
adhere to them



NS070101_Aubry_20140619



NS070101_Edwards_20150630



NS070101_Robinson_20150316



NS070101_Ross_20150310



NS070101_Worley_20140708

Management of Oral History Collections

manage your files

audio editing and preservation

From the OHA's *Principles and Best Practices for Oral History*:

“Interviewers, sponsoring institutions, and institutions charged with the preservation of oral history interviews should understand that appropriate care and storage of original recordings begins immediately after their creation.”

audio editing and preservation

“The recordings of the interviews should be stored, processed, refreshed and accessed according to established archival standards designated for the media format used. Whenever possible, all efforts should be made to preserve electronic files in formats that are cross platform and nonproprietary. Finally, the obsolescence of all media formats should be assumed and planned for.”

audio editing and preservation

treat your oral history
sound or video file as you
would any irreplaceable
electronic file

audio editing and preservation

learn basic digital
preservation techniques

transcription

From the OHA's *Principles and Best Practices for Oral History*:

“In order to augment the accessibility of the interview, repositories should make transcriptions, indexes, time tags, detailed descriptions or other written guides to the contents.”

transcription

in-house or
outsource?

transcription

quality control
is a must

transcription

preservation
of transcript

description: finding aids and cataloging

oral histories deserve the same
respect and treatment as any
other collection in your repository

description: finding aids and cataloging

apply existing descriptive standards (such as DACS)

description: finding aids and cataloging

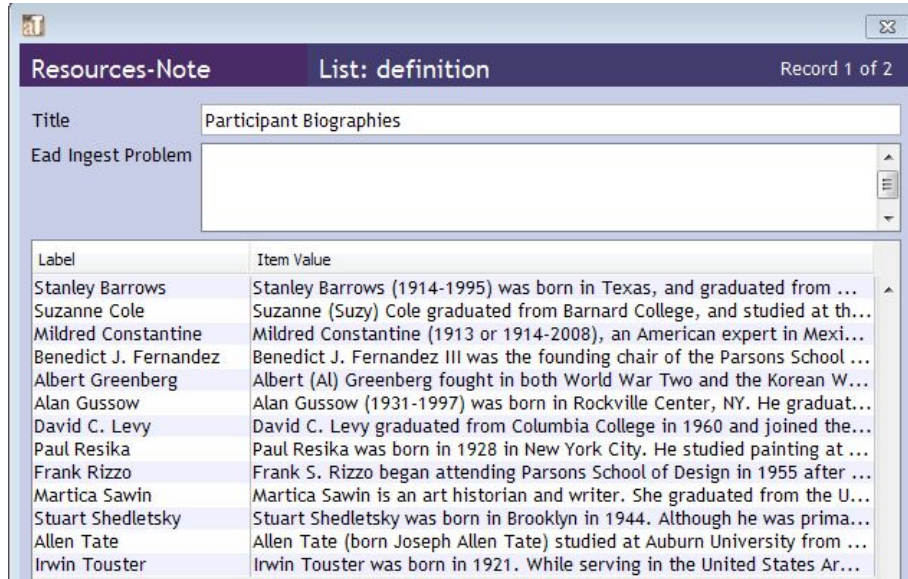
Related Materials note, from OHA's Principles and Best Practices for Oral History:

“Information deemed relevant for the interpretation of the oral history by future users, such as photographs, documents, or other records should be collected, and archivists should make clear to users the availability and connection of these materials to the recorded interview.”

description: finding aids and cataloging

basic access points,
such as interviewee and
interviewer names/authorities,
possibly also topical access points

description: finding aids and cataloging



The screenshot shows a library catalog record for a resource titled "Participant Biographies". The record is displayed in a window titled "Resources-Note" with a sub-header "List: definition" and "Record 1 of 2". The title field contains "Participant Biographies". Below the title field is a section for "Ead Ingest Problem" which is currently empty. The main content of the record is a table with two columns: "Label" and "Item Value". The table lists ten individuals with their names in the "Label" column and brief biographical descriptions in the "Item Value" column.

Label	Item Value
Stanley Barrows	Stanley Barrows (1914-1995) was born in Texas, and graduated from ...
Suzanne Cole	Suzanne (Suzy) Cole graduated from Barnard College, and studied at th...
Mildred Constantine	Mildred Constantine (1913 or 1914-2008), an American expert in Mexi...
Benedict J. Fernandez	Benedict J. Fernandez III was the founding chair of the Parsons School ...
Albert Greenberg	Albert (Al) Greenberg fought in both World War Two and the Korean W...
Alan Gussov	Alan Gussov (1931-1997) was born in Rockville Center, NY. He graduat...
David C. Levy	David C. Levy graduated from Columbia College in 1960 and joined the...
Paul Resika	Paul Resika was born in 1928 in New York City. He studied painting at ...
Frank Rizzo	Frank S. Rizzo began attending Parsons School of Design in 1955 after ...
Martica Sawin	Martica Sawin is an art historian and writer. She graduated from the U...
Stuart Shedletsky	Stuart Shedletsky was born in Brooklyn in 1944. Although he was prima...
Allen Tate	Allen Tate (born Joseph Allen Tate) studied at Auburn University from ...
Irwin Touster	Irwin Touster was born in 1921. While serving in the United States Ar...

bio notes for
both interviewee
AND interviewer

description: finding aids and cataloging

Note Content

In this audio interview with Martica Sawin, Mildred Constantine discusses joining the Graphic Design Department as an art and design history instructor at Parsons School of Design while also serving as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). She also describes her teaching methodologies and pedagogical philosophies during her time as an instructor of first-year students.

summary of interview

online or offline access

From the OHA's *Principles and Best Practices for Oral History*:

“Institutions charged with the preservation and access of oral history interviews should honor the stipulations of prior agreements made with the interviewers or sponsoring institutions including restrictions on access and methods of distribution.”

online or offline access

THE NEW SCHOOL ARCHIVES Digital Collections



Browse by: [COLLECTIONS](#) [ITEMS](#) [PEOPLE](#) [ORGANIZATIONS](#) [TOPICS](#) [SEARCH](#)

[Home](#) > [Libraries & Archives](#) > [Archives & Special Collections](#) > [Digital Collections](#)

Oral Histories

The New School Archives collects and sponsors oral history projects with themes related to aspects of New School history.

Presented here is a representative interview from each of our oral history collections, alongside a description of the collection to which the interview belongs. To see all of the interviews belonging to a particular collection, click on the collection title.



Audio interview with Celeste Lacy Davis

(1/7)

The New School oral history program

About the Collection: The New School Oral History Program, initiated in 2012, consists of recorded sound interviews conducted by Archives and Special Collections staff and faculty partners on an ongoing basis to document aspects of university history that may not exist in other recorded formats. Interviewees consist of New School administrators, faculty, and staff, both current and retired. These interviews cover the twentieth and early twenty-first history of different academic departments and disciplines, university offices, and affiliated institutes. Recordings are all in English.

Date: 2012-2014

Related people/organizations: Julia Foulkes, Wendy Scheir, Celeste Lacy Davis

[VIEW FEATURED RECORD](#)

promotion and outreach

From the OHA's *Principles and Best Practices for Oral History*:

“Interviewers should strive to make the interviews accessible to the community and where appropriate to include representatives of the community in public programs or presentations of the oral history material.”

promotion and outreach

need to actively and
continuously publicize oral
history collections' existence

promotion and outreach



Brooklyn Historical @brooklynhistory · 2h

Thanks @DNAinfo for great coverage of our new #oralhistory project: Voices of Crown Heights dnainfo.com/1q0eaT3



2



2



employ social media to alert your repository's followers that new histories are available or highlight a relevant interview on a particular anniversary

promotion and outreach

Week 6: Mobilization and “diversity”

*Oct. 6

- New School archives – 1990-2000
- “A Program to Create Diversity Throughout the College Community,” Final Report to the Ford Foundation, Eugene Lang College & NSSR, (March) 1995.
- Celeste Lacy Davis oral history,
http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/objects/NS070101_Davis_20131121

if your repository is associated with a school, let teachers know that the histories are available for classroom use

promotion and outreach

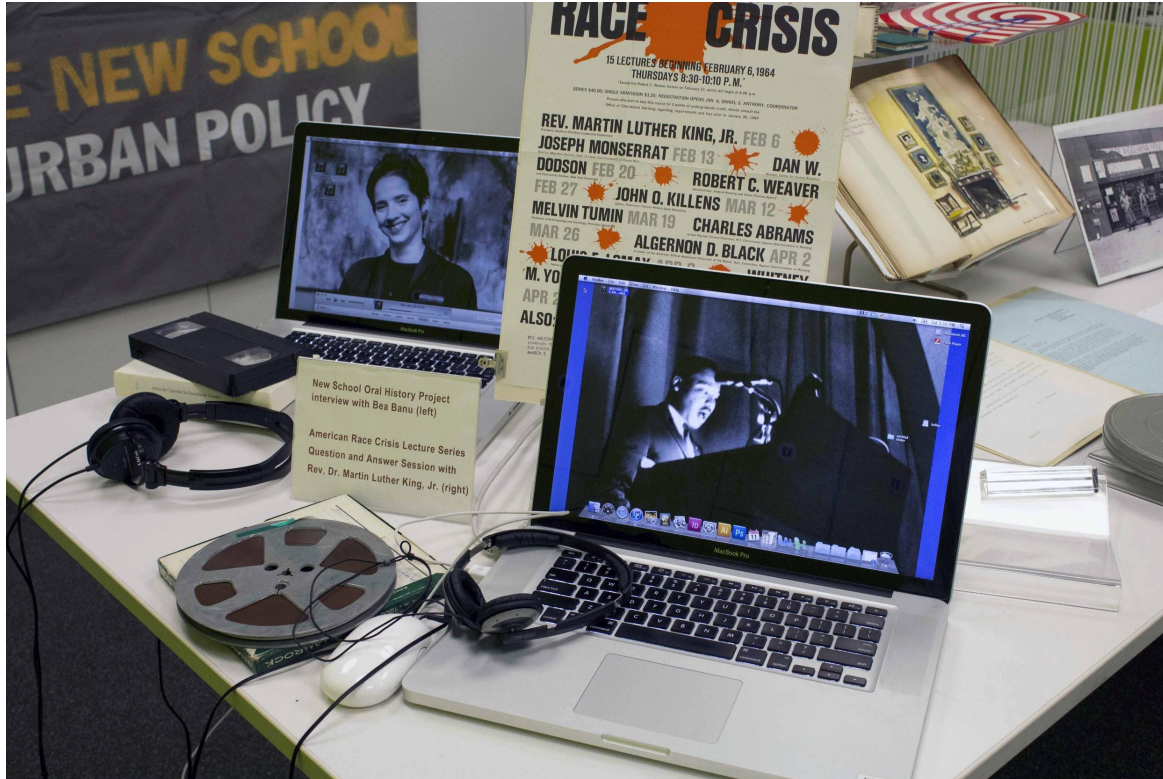
Professor Gabrielle
Bendiner-Viani's
Visual Urbanism class
visits the Archives (2012)



promotion and outreach

histories can
be incorporated into
physical or online exhibitions

promotion and outreach

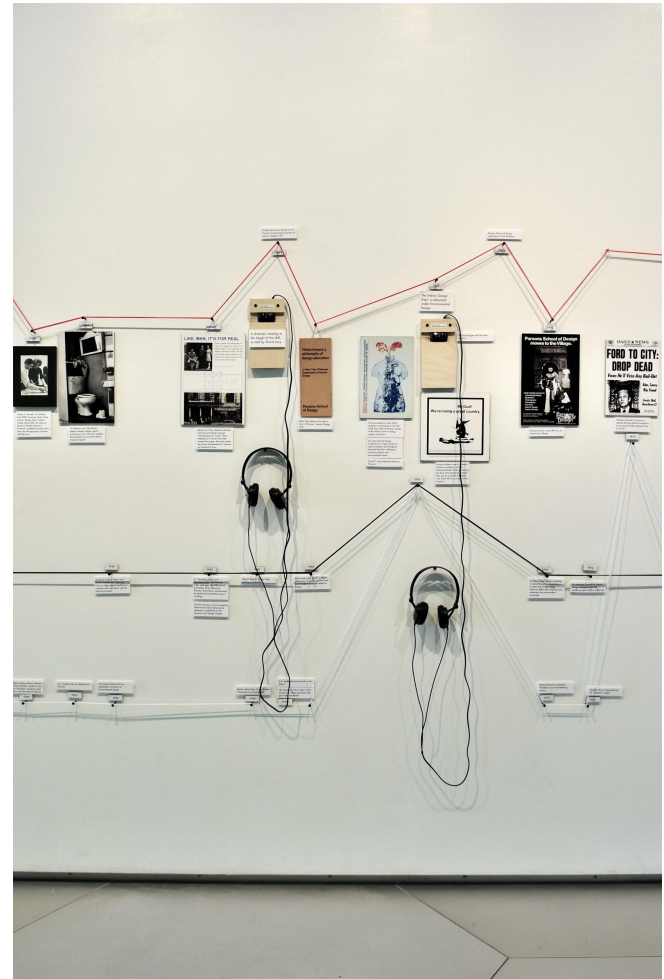


New School
Alumni Day
Open House (2013)

promotion and outreach

Radical Shifts: Reshaping the Interior at
Parsons exhibition,
Sheila Johnson Design Center (2011)

Photograph by Lee Gibson



promotion and outreach

write a press release
-- or better yet, get someone
to write one for you -- and send
it to media outlets in your area

promotion and outreach

get out of your repository
and talk up your oral history
program at any chance you
get -- and if you can't find a pre-
existing chance, make one yourself.

promotion and outreach

share your knowledge
and your mistakes
so others can benefit

#LearnGrowRepeat

RESOURCES

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

<http://www2.archivists.org/standards/DACS>

Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History

http://libraries.uky.edu/libpage.php?lweb_id=11&llib_id=13<ab_id=1369#libscroller

Oral History in the Digital Age

<http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/>

Oral History Association Principles and Best Practices

<http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>

Public Broadcasting Metadata Dictionary Project

<http://pbcore.org/>

Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide

<http://www.folklife.si.edu/resources/pdf/interviewingguide.pdf>

Archives of American Art. (2013). *Draft Guidelines for Audiovisual Description in Archivists' Toolkit in AAA*. <https://docs.google.com/a/newschool.edu/file/d/0B6DD1e2ac0hXM25RcHNtNkIKd28/edit>

RESOURCES (cont.)

Charlton, Thomas L., Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless, eds. *Handbook of Oral History*. Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2006.

Mackay, Nancy. *Curating Oral Histories from Interview to Archive*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007.

Mackay, Nancy, Mary Kay Quinlan, and Barbara W. Sommer, eds. *Community Oral History Toolkit*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2012-2013. Five volumes: 1. *Introduction to Community Oral History*. 2. *Planning a Community Oral History Project*. 3. *Managing a Community Oral History Project*. 4. *Interviewing in Community Oral History*. 5. *After the Interview in Community Oral History*.

Matters, Marion E. *Oral History Cataloging Manual*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1995.

Maze, Elinor. "Metadata: Best Practices for Oral History Access and Preservation." *Oral History in the Digital Age*. Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2012. Web. Retrieved February 5, 2014.

Ritchie, Donald A. *Doing Oral History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

RESOURCES (cont.)

Blythe, Robert. *Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village*. New York: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1969.

DeMallie, Raymond J., ed. *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984.

Medved, Michael and David Wallechinsky. *What Really Happened to the Class of '65?* New York: Random House, 1976.

Perks, Robert and Alistair Thomson, editors. *The Oral History Reader*. London: Routledge, 1998. (Jenny's favorite contributors are those of Katherine Borland, Cliff Kuhn and Marjorie L. McLellan, Linda Shopes, Ellen Swain, and Jan Walmsley).

Portelli, Alessandro. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

Rosengarten, Theodore. *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw*. New York: Knopf, 1975.

RESOURCES (cont.)

Stanton, Brandon. *Humans of New York: Stories*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015.

Terkel, Studs. *Division Street: America*. New York: Pantheon, 1967.

----- . *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1970.

----- . *Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel about What They Do*. New York: Pantheon, 1974.

----- . *American Dreams, Lost and Found*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

----- . *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War II*. New York: Pantheon, 1984.