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The Person Behind the Job: The Occupational Folklife Project at the Library of Congress

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About this Collection

The Occupational Folklife Project (OFP) began in 2010 as a multi-year project by the American Folklife Center (AFC) to document the culture of contemporary American workers during an era of economic and social transition. To date, fieldworkers across the United States have recorded more than 900 audio and audiovisual oral history interviews with workers in scores of trades, industries, crafts, and professions. The completed interviews have been incorporated into the American Folklife Center archive at the Library of Congress.

The interviews, which average 50-60 minutes in length, feature workers discussing their current jobs and formative work experiences, reflecting on their training, on-the-job challenges and rewards, aspirations, and occupational communities. In many cases, interviewees were asked to trace the career choices and educational paths that lead them to their present jobs and share their thoughts on the future of their professions.

The Occupational Folklife Project includes field documentation on selected topics created by dozens of researchers or research teams throughout the United States. To honor the memory of folklorist Archie Green (1917-2000), the Archie Green Collection...
OFP COLLECTIONS AVAILABLE ONLINE:

- Cultural Traditions of Ironworkers in the Midwest
- Western Folklife Center: Gold Mining in Nevada
- The "Big Top" Show Goes On
- Working the Port of Houston
- Stable Views: Voices and Stories from the Thoroughbred Racetrack
- Hairdressers and Beauty Shop Culture in America
- Taking Care: Documenting the Occupational Culture of Home Health Care Workers
- Funeral Services Workers in the Carolinas
- Homeless Shelter Workers in the Upper Midwest
- Illuminating History: Union Electricians in New York
- Working the Waterfront: New Bedford, Massachusetts
American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1940

About this Collection

Related Resources

Rights and Access

Teaching Resources
American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the WPA Federal Writers Project - For Teachers

Expert Resources
Finding Aid – United States Work Projects Administration Records
Manuscript Reading Room

About this Collection

This collection of life histories consists of approximately 2,900 documents, compiled and transcribed by more than 300 writers from 24 states, working on the Folklore Project of the Federal Writers' Project, a New Deal jobs program that was part of the U.S. Works Progress (later Work Projects) Administration (WPA) from 1936 to 1940. Typically 2,000-15,000 words in length, the documents vary in form from narratives to dialogues to reports to case histories. They chronicle vivid life stories of Americans who lived at the turn of the century and include tales of meeting Billy the Kid, surviving the 1871 Chicago fire, pioneer journeys out West, grueling factory work, and the immigrant experience. Writers hired by this Depression-era work project included Ralph Ellison, Nelson Algren, May Swenson, and many others. The documents often describe the informant's physical appearance, family, education, income, occupation, political views, religion and mores. Pseudonyms are often substituted for individuals and places named in the narrative texts. The life histories comprise a small part of the larger Manuscript Division collection titled United States Work Projects Administration Records.

About the Federal Writers’ Project

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Kim Spicer interview conducted by Setare S. Arashloo and Jaime Lopez, 2017-06-02.

Audio recording of interview with Kim Spicer.
2017-06-02

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[Images associated with interview.]
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[Transcript of interview with Kim Spicer.]
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About this Item

Title
Kim Spicer interview conducted by Setare S. Arashloo and Jaime Lopez, 2017-06-02.

Summary
Kim Spicer is an A-Journeywoman from Brooklyn, who now lives in Electchester. She talks about her hobbies, her previous jobs, and how she became an electrician through the Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW) program. She speaks about her job at a residential high rise and explains how she would troubleshoot and fix a three-way switch. She talks about the different Union clubs that she is involved with, including the Wellness Club devoted to keeping electricians healthy, her co-workers and the different ways that she connected with them; and her experience as a female union member in a male-dominated field.

Part of
Illuminating History: Union Electricians in New York City, Archie Green Fellows Project, 2016 to 2017 (22)
Occupational Folklife Project (303)
American Folklife Center (37,183)
Kim Spicer interviewed by Jaime Lopez and Setare Arashloo

Jamie Lopez: Okay, so just a little note. This was an idea that was based out of the stories that we share on the job. You get to know journeymen and women. Share stories about each other and create these relationships, but when you leave the job or you separate these stories get lost. This is almost honoring those conversations as well. [00:00:30] If you would like to start by telling us your name and your job title.

Kim Spicer: Kim Spicer, a journey wire woman.

Jamie Lopez: Okay. Can you tell us your background? Where you were born, where your parents are from.

Kim Spicer: Okay, I was born in Brooklyn New York. My mom was born in Staten Island New York and my dad was born in South Carolina. I was going to say New York.

Jamie Lopez: [00:01:00] What neighborhood do you live in now?
About this Item

Title
Kim Spicer interview conducted by Setare S. Arashloo and Jaime Lopez. 2017-06-02.

Summary
Kim Spicer is an award-winning woman from Brooklyn, who now lives in Electchester. She talks about her hobbies, her previous jobs, and how she became an electrician through the Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW) program. She speaks about her job at a residential high rise and explains how she would troubleshoot and fix a three-way switch. She talks about the different Union clubs that she is involved with, including the Wellness Club, devoted to keeping electricians healthy; her co-workers and the different ways that they connected with them; and also explains how her skills unsafe when working with careless people. She recounts growing up in Brownsville (Brooklyn), where she was raised to be careful and pay attention to her environment—a skill which she also developed as an electrician. She states that dust and insects are the most annoying part of her job, and wishes there were nicer, cleaner, and more comfortable job she bathrooms. Kim explains how her job feels creative when she works on data racks and conduit work—next, neat, clean, and organized. She passes all on to apprentices when she sees potential in them, and also mentions her favorite Local 3 tradition—mentors giving A-cards to their mentees when they complete their apprenticeship. Being an IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) Journeyman makes her feel proud and accomplished, and she notes the challenges of being the electrician and handyman in her family. She talks about her apartment in Electchester, which is quiet, and convenient for attending union meetings; discusses Free programs; like karate for community children—her daughter attends; and notes that she shares her mechanical skills with her daughter at every opportunity.

Contributor Names
Spicer, Kim, Interviewee.
Arashloo, Setare S., Interviewer.
Occupational Folklife Project, Sponsor.

Created / Published
2017-06-02

Subject Headings
- Spicer, Kim—Interviews
- Accidents
- Apprenticeship programs
- Blue collar workers
- Clubs
- Diversity in the workplace
- Hazardous occupations

Part of
Illuminating History: Union Electricians in New York City, Archie Green Fellows Project, 2016 to 2017 (22)
Occupational Folklife Project (303)
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Audio Recording

Contributors
Arashloo, Setare S.
Lopez, Jaime
Occupational Folklife Project
Spicer, Kim

Dates
2017

Location
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New York

Language
English

Subjects
Accidents
Apprenticeship Programs
Blue Collar Workers
Clubs
Color
Digital Photographs
Diversity in the Workplace
Occupational Folklife Project

The Occupational Folklife Project is (OFP) a multi-year documentation project that seeks to capture a portrait of America's workforce during a time of transition. It gathers community-based oral history interviews with workers across the United States, discussing their workplace experiences, training, and occupational communities. The American Folklife Center (AFC) at the Library of Congress serves as the primary repository for the resulting oral history collections. Copies of local projects also may be retained by the local library, museum, organization, or individual that collects and submits the material.

The Occupational Folklife Project concentrates on unedited audio and video interviews and interview-related digital images. Participants in the Occupational Folklife Project are asked to follow specific guidelines, which include:

1. Supplying all data requested on the Interview Metadata Form.
2. Creating an audio or video interview in an approved format.
3. Obtaining required Library of Congress permission/release forms from interviewees.
4. Electronically completing and submitting all of the above following the guidelines provided.

Before beginning a project you must obtain permission from the American Folklife Center to submit the materials you collect to the Library of Congress. If you are interested in participating, please review the General Information About Interviews page and then contact AFC Folklife Specialist Nancy Groce at ngro@loc.gov or 202-707-1744.

This site contains introductory information on the steps outlined above. You will also find tips on interviewing and sample interview questions, which we recommend you use as guides.
**Folklife and Fieldwork: An Introduction to Cultural Documentation**

**Fourth Edition, 2016**
By Stephen Winick and Peter Bartis

*View or download full text in PDF* [47 pp.; 3.36MB]

*Go to the list of resources*

When the first edition of *Folklife and Fieldwork* was published in 1979, our readers had a difficult choice to make: the better audio quality offered by a bulky reel-to-reel tape recorder or the convenience of the newfangled cassette deck. With one of those two machines, plus a single-lens-reflex camera and a few rolls of film, the 1979 fieldworker was equipped to document the world. Earlier editions of this guide gave great advice regarding the handling and preservation of these older forms of documentation. These tips are still relevant for some archival collections, but not for most fieldwork. Born-digital documentation requires a whole new set of practices—new ways of recording and new methods of preservation.

Since the first edition appeared there has also been a surge of interest in personal archiving. Preserving family history, genealogy, and community history has never been more popular. Popular interviewing projects like the Veterans History Project and StoryCorps are leading the way in a new era of oral history collecting, and both of their collections are part of the American Folklife Center archive. While this book prioritizes the documentation of folklife, by which we mean traditional culture and heritage, the guidelines offered here for interviewing and documentation apply to a broad range of topics.

*Available as a PDF download at this link.*
We will also mail physical copies for free---email a request to folklife@loc.gov.

**A Spanish language version of this edition is available** (fourth edition, 2018)
Thank you!

Questions? Post them in the chat box!