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Gail Mary Killian and Stephen Desroches sound recordings14439340

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Description is written in: English.

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Oral History Archives at Columbia

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Summary Information

Repository:	Oral History Archives at Columbia
Creator:	Killian, Gail Mary, 1953-1988
Creator:	DesRoches, Stephen K. (Stephen Killian), 1974-
Title:	Gail Mary Killian and Stephen Desroches sound recordings
ID:	14439340
ID:	OHAC
Date [inclusive]:	1970-2003
Physical Description:	23 audiocassettes
Language of the Material:	Collection is mostly in English with some recordings containing Polish.

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Biographical / Historical

Gail Mary Killian (March 30, 1953-August 11, 1988) was a recording enthusiast with Down syndrome who lived in Eastern Massachusetts. She received a tape recorder for her birthday in 1970. Recording her birthday each year became an annual tradition from 1970-1984. She also recorded daily life and visits from friends and neighbors, including her best friend Denise. Killian was an avid music fan, who enjoyed rock and roll and traditional Polish music. Her interest in documenting her life and the world around her extended to other media as well. She retained every greeting card that she ever received, kept a diary, and recorded every movie and television show that she saw by annotating TV Guide.

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Biographical / Historical

Stephen Desroches has worked as a journalist in Provincetown, MA on Cape Cod. He received a degree from Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism in 2002. Desroches has

worked to preserve and document his family's history, both by interviewing older relatives and by stewarding the tapes and diary of his aunt Gail Mary Killian until their donation to archives.

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Scope and Contents

The majority of the collection's interviews were taken by Gail Mary Killian and document her life in the 1970s-1980s as a woman living with Down syndrome in Eastern Massachusetts. Killian recorded her birthday starting in 1970, and many recordings capture the conversations that took place at these celebrations, which were attended by family members and neighbors. Topics discussed at these parties include music-related gifts received by Killian; rock music and Polish folk music; television shows and movies; employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the region; work at the United States Postal Service (her father's employer); and happenings in their local community. The family also sings together, both in English and Polish. Also included are recordings made by Killian during her daily life. Killian was an avid music fan, and she records thoughts on rock bands such as the Beatles, Journey, and Van Halen. Portions of the local New Bedford, MA radio program "Polish Happy Hour" are captured on tape.

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Scope and Contents

The collection also contains three oral history interviews by Killian's nephew Stephen Desroches, who donated all tapes. One interview is with Desroches' grandfather Stanley Killian, taken in 1991. This interview documents Killian's experiences in World War II. A second interview was taken in 2003 with three relatives of Desroches: Stanley Killian (grandfather), Eugene Killian (great-uncle), and Helen Killian (grandmother). This interview covers the experiences of their immigrant parents, the Great Depression, World War II, and their thoughts on politics and social issues at the time of the interview. Desroches also interviews Schuyler "Ted" Meyer, the police chief of Provincetown, MA, about Meyer's experiences in law enforcement in an artistic Cape Cod town.

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Arrangement

The collection is arranged in two series. The series are based on the provenance of the interviews. Within each series, recordings are arranged chronologically.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Oral History Archives at Columbia

Revision Description

Links to digitized material added. kws 2020-12-04

Conditions Governing Access

Access: Open

Conditions Governing Use

Copyright by the Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York, 2018

Custodial History

Stephen Desroches was immediate source of acquisition for all tapes. They were gifted to the Oral History Archives at Columbia in 2018. Desroches is the nephew of Gail Mary Killian. Eighteen tapes were created by Killian and five were created by Desroches

Processing Information

Finding aid written by David A. Olson in 2020, incorporating description provided by donor Stephen Desroches.

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Related Materials

Related Materials

The item "Diary and notebook of Gail Mary Killian" (GDP / 165) is found in the Great Diary Project of the Archives of the Bishopgate Institute, London, United Kingdom

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Controlled Access Headings

- Down syndrome -- Social aspects.
- Polish Americans -- Social life and customs.
- Rock music -- Social aspects
- World War, 1939-1945
- Depressions -- 1929
- Police -- Interviews.
- Provincetown (Mass.)
- Taunton (Mass.)
- New Bedford (Mass.)
- Fall River (Mass.)
- Sound recordings
- Oral histories (literary works)
- Interviews
- Beatles
- Journey (Musical group)

Collection Inventory

Gail Mary Killian sound recordings, 1971-1984

Physical Description: 18 audiocassettes

Title/Description	Instances
New tape recorder / Rusty, 1970	box OHAC
<u>Physical Description:</u> 1 audiocassettes	C9
<u>Digital Object:</u> New tape recorder / Rusty, 1970	

Scope and Contents

Gail Mary Killian discusses favorite television shows, her dog Rusty, and her favorite books. She also discusses the Beatles at length with a friend.

Recording of Gail Mary Killian's birthday (1971), 1971

box OHAC
C9

Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Recording of Gail Mary Killian's birthday \(1971\), 1971](#)

Scope and Contents

Recording documents Gail Mary Killian's birthday celebration. Discussions include Killian receiving a Beatles album as a gift, and Killian teaching older guests the slang term "bread" meaning money.

Tape labeled "Not Clear", circa 1971-1972

box OHAC
C9

Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Tape labeled "Not Clear", circa 1971-1972](#)

Scope and Contents

Recording of teaching the baby to talk and a conversation about employment opportunities for people with disabilities in Taunton and Fall River, Massachusetts.

Recording of Gail Mary Killian's 19th birthday, 1972

box OHAC
C9

Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Recording of Gail Mary Killian's 19th birthday, 1972](#)

Scope and Contents

Recording documents Gail Mary Killian's nineteenth birthday. Highlights include Killian's baby niece saying new words and adults trying to get the baby to make a peace sign.

Recording of Gail Mary Killian's birthday (1973), 1973

box OHAC
C9

Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Recording of Gail Mary Killian's birthday \(1973\), 1973](#)

Scope and Contents

Recording documents Gail Mary Killian's birthday celebration. There is a conversation about work for the United States Postal Service, as Killian's father and neighbor worked for the USPS. Guests sing "Happy Birthday." There is also a conversation about polka

music and dancing, both of which were popular in her neighborhood, which was a Polish enclave.

Helen Singing, 1973

box OHAC
C9

Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Helen Singing, 1973](#)

Scope and Contents

Gail Mary Killian records her mother Helen snoring (the tape's title is a play on the snoring as "singing") while the Boston Red Sox game plays on radio. Recording also includes playing Partridge Family records and singing along with the baby.

Recording of Gail Mary Killian's birthday (Birthday 21; 1974), 1974

box OHAC
C9

Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Recording of Gail Mary Killian's birthday \(Birthday 21; 1974\), 1974](#)

Scope and Contents

Recording documents Gail Mary Killian's twenty-first birthday celebration. Recording is comprised of conversation and singing in Polish.

Recording of Gail Mary Killian's birthday (Birthday1974; 1974), 1974

box OHAC
C9

Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Recording of Gail Mary Killian's birthday \(Birthday1974; 1974\), 1974](#)

Scope and Contents

Recording documents Gail Mary Killian's twenty-first birthday celebration. Recoding includes discussion of "Tonight Show."

Recording of Gail Mary Killian's birthday (Birthday 1976), 1976

box OHAC
C9

Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Recording of Gail Mary Killian's birthday \(Birthday 1976\), 1976](#)

Scope and Contents

Recording documents Gail Mary Killian's twenty-third birthday celebration.

Various artists / Talkin' and Radio, circa 1977

box OHAC
C9

Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Various artists / Talkin' and Radio, circa 1977](#)

Scope and Contents

Recording of Gail Mary Killian and friend listening to Foreigner and Journey and talking about which rock stars they think are cute.

Recording of Gail Mary Killian's 24th birthday (24 years, 1977), 1977

box OHAC
C9

Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Recording of Gail Mary Killian's 24th birthday \(24 years, 1977\), 1977](#)

Scope and Contents

Recording of Gail Mary Killian's twenty-fourth birthday celebration. The recording includes a discussion of "Charlie's Angels" and Farrah Fawcett. Killian receives tickets to see Andy Williams, Jim Nabors, and Bobby Vinton. The family sings Vinton's song "Melody of Love" and Polish folk songs.

Recording of Gail Mary Killian's birthday (1980), 1980

box OHAC
C9

Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Recording of Gail Mary Killian's birthday \(1980\), 1980](#)

Journey captured, 1981

box OHAC
C9

Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Journey captured, 1981](#)

Scope and Contents

Gail Mary Killian speaks with a friend while listening to the new Journey and Van Halen albums. The recording also captures a segment of "Polish Happy Hour," a local news and music program for the Polish community broadcast on a New Bedford, Massachusetts radio station.

Recording of Gail Mary Killian's birthday (Gail's birthday, 1982), 1982

box OHAC
C9

Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Recording of Gail Mary Killian's birthday \(Gail's birthday, 1982\), 1982](#)

Scope and Contents

Recording documents Gail Mary Killian's birthday celebration. Topics discussed include a neighbor's granddaughter being accepted to Yale University, increased Portuguese immigration to Taunton, and

talk of a new video arcade in town that has Ms. Pac-Man and Space Invaders.

Recording of Gail Mary Killian's 30th birthday (Carol's house, 1983), 1983	box OHAC C9
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Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Recording of Gail Mary Killian's 30th birthday \(Carol's house, 1983\), 1983](#)

Scope and Contents

Recording of a surprise party at Carol's house for Gail Mary Killian.

Recording of Gail Mary Killian's 30th birthday (Party at home, 1983), 1983	box OHAC C9
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Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Recording of Gail Mary Killian's 30th birthday \(Party at home, 1983\), 1983](#)

Scope and Contents

Recording documents Gail Mary Killian's thirtieth birthday celebration. Topics discussed include a mean priest, labor issues at the United States Postal Service, changes in tourism patterns on Cape Cod, and a substitute teacher in the town who is blind. Killian receives records by the Go Go's and Toto.

Recording of Gail Mary Killian's 31st birthday (Happy birthday 31st, 1984), 1984	box OHAC C9
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Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Recording of Gail Mary Killian's 31st birthday \(Happy birthday 31st, 1984\), 1984](#)

Scope and Contents

Recording documents Gail Mary Killian's thirty-first birthday celebration.

New Bedford polka program, undated	box OHAC C9
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Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [New Bedford polka program, undated](#)

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Stephen Desroches oral history interviews, 1991-2003

Physical Description: 5 audiocassettes

Title/Description	Instances
Oral history interview with Stanley Killian, 1991	

Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

box OHAC

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Stanley Killian, 1991](#)

C9

Scope and Contents

This interview with Stanley Killian (1922-1999) was conducted by his grandson Stephen Desroches. The interview was taken when Desroches was sixteen for a high school assignment in which students were to ask older family members about World War II. The tape incidentally contains a recording of Desroches narrating the movie Jaws II.

Oral history interview with Stanley Killian, Eugene Killian, and Helen Killian, September 27, September 29, and October 3, 1999

box OHAC

C9

Physical Description: 3 audiocassettes

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Stanley Killian, Eugene Killian, and Helen Killian, September 27, September 29, and October 3, 1999](#)

Scope and Contents

This interview with Stanley Killian (1922-1999), Eugene Killian (1920-2012), and Helen Killian (1922-2015) was conducted by Stephen Desroches. Stanley and Helen were Desroches' grandparents, and Eugene was his great-uncle. At the time, Stanley had terminal brain cancer, and when Desroches visited he would record conversations of all present. Topics discussed include the Great Depression, World War II, and the experiences of their immigrant parents. The Killians also share their views on contemporary politics, including gun control, healthcare, the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal, and the Democratic and Republican Parties. They also discuss social issues such as divorce and couples living together before marriage.

Oral history interview with Schuyler "Ted" Meyer, 2003

box OHAC

Physical Description: 1 audiocassettes

C9

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Schuyler "Ted" Meyer, 2003](#)

Scope and Contents

This interview with Schuyler "Ted" Meyer was conducted by Stephen Desroches in 2003. Meyer was Chief of Police in Provincetown, Massachusetts, a small community at the tip of Cape Cod known for its art colony, eccentricity, and large LGBTQ community. The interview covers life in Provincetown, LGBTQ issues, and his previous experience as police chief in

Richardson, Texas. Richardson had a large Muslim population, and Meyer discusses issues around keeping the Muslim community safe in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

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