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## The Moth and The New York Public Library Team Up for Collaborative Audio Transcription Project, Together We Listen

*Crowdsourced project makes NYPL's Community Oral History Project and The Moth's story archives more accessible, searchable, and discoverable*

April 5, 2016 — [The New York Public Library](#) (NYPL) and [The Moth](#) — both curators of rich and dynamic personal storytelling archives — today are launching [Together We Listen](#), a joint project designed to make personal storytelling archives more accessible online.

Today, thousands of libraries and public media organizations publish large digital audio collections online. Most of these, however, lack transcripts or basic metadata, rendering them invisible to search engines and inaccessible to prospective users — particularly for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. To address these challenges, NYPL and The Moth were awarded a Knight Foundation Prototype grant in late 2015 to explore the intersection of automated transcription technologies and crowdsourced editing. The two organizations sent hundreds of hours of audio — more than 600 stories recorded during live Moth events from around the world, and a thousand stories from [NYPL's Community Oral History Project](#) — through Pop Up Archive, an Oakland-based speech-to-text service that works extensively with the public media and cultural heritage sectors. The computer-generated transcripts, which are comprehensive, but filled with errors, are presented to the public for a final proofreading stage.

This joint crowdsourcing effort, called Together We Listen, is centered around an interactive transcript editor developed by NYPL Labs, The New York Public Library's digitization and innovation unit. Anyone who wants to help edit



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transcripts online can visit <http://togetherwelisten.nypl.org/> where they are directed to work on either The Moth's or NYPL's story collections. NYPL is also organizing [in-person events](#) at various Library branches to encourage community members to help transcribe the oral histories for their own neighborhoods. Together We Listen will culminate in an audio hackathon and storytelling celebration event in June at NYPL. Joining a host of other open source tools released by NYPL Labs, the transcript editing software is available to be used and further developed around other audio archives.

"This program brings together the best of both worlds, combining a remarkable new technology with grassroots participation," says Ben Vershbow, Director of NYPL Labs. "Let the robots do the first pass and then invite your listeners to do the final edit — it not only creates a more accessible collection, it gives the community a chance to participate directly in the act of cultural preservation, serving our mission on multiple levels. We hope this experiment suggests a model that all libraries and public broadcasters can use."

"We couldn't have found a better partner than The New York Public Library — the foremost innovator of digital archives — to launch our first-ever digital interactive project," says Sarah Haberman, Executive Director of The Moth. "This innovative tool gives story lovers, oral history scholars, and Moth enthusiasts alike the opportunity to pitch in and help make hundreds of hours of our vast story archives dating back to 1998 — with tales ranging from heartbreaking to hilarious — more accessible."

Together We Listen is the latest example of NYPL's innovative use of public engagement to help digitize and expand access to its research collections. By participating in NYPL Labs web-based projects such as [What's On The Menu?](#), [Building Inspector](#), and [Emigrant City](#), volunteers from around the world have performed millions of discrete tasks such as transcribing dishes from historic restaurant menus, identifying buildings on old fire insurance maps, and indexing real estate transactions from historic bank records that have produced new research data sets and improved collections discovery, enhancing and supporting the Library's ongoing efforts to surface its vast holdings online. Similar to Building Inspector, Together We Listen advances NYPL's investigations into human-computer collaboration, in which collections are first



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processed automatically (using visual or audio detection techniques) and then checked and enriched by citizen participants.

Taking place at NYPL branches, The New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project is an initiative that aims to document, preserve, and celebrate the rich history of the city's unique neighborhoods by collecting the stories of people who have experienced it firsthand. The Oral History Project began in 2013 at the Jefferson Market Library in Greenwich Village, and has since expanded into neighborhoods in the Bronx, Harlem, and Staten Island, and documented communities that go beyond neighborhoods, such as Visible Lives: Oral Histories of the Disability Experience and NYC Veterans Oral History Project. To date, community volunteers have collected more than one thousand stories. All recordings are available currently at [oralhistory.nypl.org](http://oralhistory.nypl.org), and will be archived in the Library's [Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy](#) research collection.

*Together We Listen is a collaboration between NYPL Labs, The Moth, and Pop-Up Archive. With generous support provided by the Knight Prototype Fund, an initiative of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.*

#### ABOUT THE MOTH

The Moth is an acclaimed non-profit organization dedicated to the art and craft of storytelling, and a recipient of a 2012 John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation MacArthur Award for Creative & Effective Institutions (MACEI). Since launching in 1997, The Moth has presented over 20,000 stories, told live, without notes, to standing--room--only crowds worldwide. The Moth conducts seven ongoing programs: The Moth Mainstage, which tours internationally, has featured stories by Malcolm Gladwell, Darryl "DMC" McDaniels, John Turturro, Molly Ringwald, and Tig Notaro, as well as an astronaut, a pickpocket, a hot-dog eating champion and hundreds more; The Moth StorySLAM program, which conducts open mic storytelling competitions in 25 cities; 21 in the U.S., plus Sydney and Melbourne, AU, London, UK and Dublin, IE; The Moth Community Program, which offers storytelling workshops and performance opportunities to adults who are too often overlooked by the mainstream media; The Moth High School StorySLAMs, which bring the thrill of personal storytelling to high schools across the country; The Moth Podcast, which is



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downloaded more than 30 million times a year; The Moth Corporate Program, which provides industry--specific storytelling solutions; and Peabody Award--winning The Moth Radio Hour, which airs weekly on 400+ public radio stations nationwide. The international best seller, “The Moth: 50 True Stories” (with introductions by Adam Gopnik and Neil Gaiman) was published by Hachette Books and Serpent’s Tail in 2013. Learn more at [www.themoth.org](http://www.themoth.org).

#### ABOUT THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

The New York Public Library is a free provider of education and information for the people of New York and beyond. With 92 locations—including research and branch libraries—throughout the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island, the Library offers free materials, computer access, classes, exhibitions, programming and more to everyone from toddlers to scholars, and has seen record numbers of attendance and circulation in recent years. The New York Public Library serves more than 18 million patrons who come through its doors annually and millions more around the globe who use its resources at [nypl.org](http://nypl.org). To offer this wide array of free programming, The New York Public Library relies on both public and private funding. Learn more about how to support the Library at [nypl.org/support](http://nypl.org/support).