

# Oral History – Robathan, Timothy

[00:00:00] **Quang Pham:** This is Quang and I'm interviewing Tim for the immigrant oral history project. Tim could you start by telling me a little bit about yourself?

[00:00:16] **Timothy Robathan:** Sure. So my name is Tim Robathan. I'm from Australia. I was born there.

I lived there till I was about twenty-five. And then I moved abroad. I went and lived in the United Kingdom in London for about nine years. I met my wife who is American. We got married in London and then moved back to Australia for several years. We had a daughter in Australia and then we moved to the U.S. and have a second daughter now.

[00:00:51] **Quang Pham:** That's fascinating. May I ask what brought you back to Kingston specifically?

[00:00:57] **Timothy Robathan:** Sure. My [00:01:00] wife is originally from the Syracuse area in central New York. And so when we made the decision to move to the U.S. to live here we didn't want to live in central New York - a little bit too far away from everywhere and a little bit too much snow.

We didn't want to live in New York City - we'd lived in London for ten years. We wanted to raise kids. So, we looked for somewhere in between, which is how we discovered the Hudson Valley. And as we explored the valley, we came across Kingston and it seemed like an interesting place to live.

And that's how we sort of ended up here.

[00:01:40] **Quang Pham:** Okay. When you came here did you have to do things on your own or was there someone who you could rely on to help you settle in?

[00:01:49] **Timothy Robathan:** The immigration process [pause] - I did that all myself. I'm lucky enough to have English as my first language [00:02:00] and [pause] have had enough experience with legal documentation and contracts and that type of thing that I was able to work through the process myself without having to use a lawyer or an immigration specialist.

So I did that all myself and was able to transition across. Arriving here, there was a few hurdles to negotiate. But again, culturally being from a similar country with the same language, it wasn't extremely difficult for me.

[00:02:35] **Quang Pham:** Could you tell me more about the difficulties you may have encountered here in Kingston?

[00:02:41] **Timothy Robathan:** Sure. I think the first year or two, I think the things I probably had difficulty with is perhaps people understanding my accent - often having to repeat myself or use the correct terminology [00:03:00]. Coming from Australia, being a metric country. If I started talking about meters or centimeters, people would get confused.

So I had to make sure I would use Imperial measurements and even small things just using the right term for something. I think most people would understand what I was talking about, but not always quite fully grasp exactly the terminology.

[00:03:24] **Quang Pham:** Right, I'm also trying to get used to the Imperial system because my country uses the metric system.

[00:03:29] **Timothy Robathan:** Yep, yep.

[00:03:31] **Quang Pham:** It's ridiculous how many units there are. So what job were you doing back in Australia and did you have to change it coming here?

[00:03:45] **Timothy Robathan:** Yeah, correct. I was actually working in higher education. And I did have to look for a new position when I moved to the U.S. And I was lucky enough to find a [00:04:00] company that I still currently work for when I moved to the area. It did take a while - it took about six, seven months to find a job. This was in 2015 and remote workers wasn't as common back then either. So I was lucky enough to find a local based organization in Poughkeepsie. And I got a job working with them.

[00:04:23] **Quang Pham:** I imagined during that time, you still have to deal with immigration paperwork as well.

[00:04:05] **Timothy Robathan:** Yeah. I mean most of the immigration paperwork happened before I arrived in the U.S. And then once I did arrive here - honestly the tricky thing I had to negotiate was the driver's license and dealing with the DMV, which is not unique to just immigrants, but I did have to

go through the full driving tests and exams and courses in order to get the driver's license.

So that seemed like the most [00:05:00] bureaucratic process. And in order to - when my wife and I purchased a vehicle it had to be in my wife's name and not my name 'cause I wasn't able to get insurance because I didn't have the driver's license. And you know, there was a three month wait to do driving tests.

So the classic conundrum.

[00:05:20] **Quang Pham:** So perhaps... Were there any things that surprised you coming to Kingston?

[00:05:31] **Timothy Robathan:** I grew up in a city called Perth in Western Australia, which is a reasonably large population of about two million. And then I lived in London, which is obviously a huge city. So it was the first time I'd lived in a smaller population city. Kingston is, I think, twenty-five thousand.

So there's a few adjustments to get used to the size of it. But it suited me [00:06:00]. That's what we were looking for. We love not having any traffic and all the benefits of living in a smaller location. I think some of the adjustments I guess were just getting used to procedures or the way - for example - business is done or hiring a contractor or anything like that.

[00:06:26] **Quang Pham:** Mostly logistics?

[00:06:27] **Timothy Robathan:** Yeah, logistics related.

[00:06:29] **Quang Pham:** Let's see [pause]. How do you feel about the neighborhood now that you've lived here for quite some time?

[00:06:37] **Timothy Robathan:** I love it. When we first moved here in 2015, we didn't know anyone - we didn't know anybody in Kingston. We knew one or two people in the Hudson Valley and that was it. So, it was a bit of a gamble moving here.

But we grew to love it pretty quickly. I'd say definitely the first six to twelve months was a difficult transition for me [00:07:00], not knowing people. But then, as we stayed here longer and longer, the more people we met and we have an amazing circle of friends and being parents of young kids, we quickly met other parents with little children and we bonded pretty quickly. And that definitely made the transition a lot easier.

[00:07:19] **Quang Pham:** Certainly. Do you have anyone you could call a family friend?

[00:07:23] **Timothy Robathan:** I would say not family because they're not family technically, but definitely a close circle of friends that we sort of can rely on. And if we need help or for some reason we can't pick our child up from the school, they'll turn up for us.

So if we're going to sort of put it into that category I would say - yes.

[00:07:47] **Quang Pham:** What about your friends back from Australia? Do you keep in touch with?

[00:07:51] **Timothy Robathan:** Yeah, absolutely – keep in regular touch. Social media definitely makes it easier. You know, the pandemic's been difficult. We [00:08:00] haven't gone back to Australia for three years now, which is the longest period of time I've been away from my family and friends.

So it's been hard. But we're hoping to go back in the next year or so.

[00:08:12] **Quang Pham:** Certainly. And having a sense of community here helps with the homesickness a bit.

[00:08:15] **Timothy Robathan:** Exactly, that's right. The longer we've been here, that community just gets stronger and stronger and that really does make a difference.

[00:08:24] **Quang Pham:** Certainly. When I came here, I didn't know anyone as well. And I am not even an immigrant, so.... And I only have Bard to go. So it really helps that people were really there to help you. And it certainly does help.

[00:08:39] **Timothy Robathan:** Yeah, absolutely.

[00:08:41] **Quang Pham:** Have you adopted any new American traditions to your family or even your...?

[00:08:48] **Timothy Robathan:** Yeah, I mean I guess - it's a funny one - because myself being Australian, but having lived in the United Kingdom for a long time in London, which is probably one of the biggest ex-pat [00:09:00] cities in the globe. And my wife having spent most of her adult life living in London as well. We're an interesting mix of cultures where we've lived in both the U.S., the U.K., and Australia. Often we find ourselves trying to work out the

correct term for something and I'll often get the U.S. term right and my wife will end up using the British term. And then we're correcting each other and so forth.

But in terms of adopting some traditions, we definitely picked up on one, which was celebrating the forth of July every year.

[00:09:39] **Quang Pham:** It's iconic.

[00:09:40] **Timothy Robathan:** Yeah. And we actually did it more as - not so much to recognize independence day, as much as it was we just wanted to have a big outdoor celebration because we have a nice big backyard and we kind of made that our annual tradition. So we've been doing that every year. And we have all our friends over.

Lots of food [00:10:00]. Lots of good drinks. My wife works in the wine industry, so lots of good wine. But we do have the tradition of setting up a few small fireworks and sparklers at the end of the night.

[00:10:12] **Quang Pham:** Yeah, you certainly do love outdoor celebrations. You think that people would welcome that aspect, to do that here? Celebrate more of what you are used to doing back in Australia?

[00:10:26] **Timothy Robathan:** Yeah, I think Australia - being a warm climate - we're definitely an outdoors culture. We love our sports. We love being outside. Life is very much orientated that way. And so definitely for me - my favorite time is the spring, the summer and the early fall. Adjusting to the winter has been difficult for me.

I'm not used to the snow. I can definitely skip those three months of the year. But yeah, definitely the outdoor lifestyle. I love the Catskills. The Catskills at the [00:11:00] doorstep is amazing. That's probably one of the things that drew us to Kingston. It was a large enough city to give us all the things we wanted. Yet close enough to everything else we needed in our lives, which is great hiking, camping - within an hour or two - lots of outdoor activities. So, we really enjoy the location.

[00:11:23] **Quang Pham:** I find that Bard is a perfect place to engage in community activities as well as with the nature because it's so connected to the community around it.

That's something I love about Bard, as well. So... You mentioned that you worked in higher education. What do you think about that here?

[00:11:56] **Timothy Robathan:** Interesting question. So, I worked on the [00:12:00] vendor side of the industry, supporting higher education. I worked with a technology company that provides software and application services for the higher ed industry in the U.S. So I don't work directly for colleges or universities, but I'm working for a company that we provide services to them.

But that's a good question because in Australia - and similar to the United Kingdom as well - higher education is heavily subsidized by the government. And prior to when I went to college myself - up until I think the early nineties - university and college in Australia was free and there were no charges for students.

By the time I went to do my undergraduate in Australia, there were fees, but it was very affordable. It would be probably maybe two to four thousand U.S. dollars a year. So very affordable [00:13:00]. And you pay it back when you begin working and can afford to pay back those fees to the government.

Over the years, those fees have gone up. But of course the U.S. is quite a different market. And what's interesting about the U.S. - and I think that what I found most surprising - is the amount of private institutions. Private institutions are probably typically more expensive in the U.S. and even with public institutions the fees are very - on a global scale - would be considered very expensive.

You know annual fees from twenty-five to fifty thousand plus for college tuition is a lot. And at the end of four years, students leaving college with what could be compared to - I guess - a small mortgage. Whether it's the students or the parents or both or whoever having to spend [00:14:00] a long period of time paying that back.

So that was quite surprising. And I still do find that surprising - that college is so expensive in the U.S. And it's been interesting that since I lived here, it has been a very hot political point. And still continues to be to this day.

[00:14:20] **Quang Pham:** Did you plan to send your daughter to college here or back in Australia?

[00:14:26] **Timothy Robathan:** That's another good question. I think we're going to wait and see what happens in ten years. My wife is a big advocate for

sending our two daughters to college abroad. So, we'll have to see what happens. At the same time it would be nice to have them nearby and we do live in the Northeast of the U.S. So there's a lot of college options available to us. I think it also depends on what our daughters want as well.

[00:14:55] **Quang Pham:** Certainly. So you did plan to travel back [00:15:00] and forth between Australia and the United States often, at least in the coming years or so. This is more of an abstract question, but in what ways has your migration here changed your sense of identity?

[00:13:54] **Timothy Robathan:** That's a really good question.

Having lived abroad for quite a long time, I still have spent most of my life living in Australia, but within the next ten years, it'll almost be more time spent living abroad. I still identify as an Australian and always have, and I think I always will because that's where I grew up. I spent my childhood...

But I think having lived in the United Kingdom for close to nine years, and now having lived in the U S for nearly seven years, it definitely rounds you as a - it may be a cliché term, but I guess [00:16:00] - a global citizen. Just through my life experiences, living abroad in different countries and traveled a lot - I've spent a lot of time traveling to a lot of different countries - I think I've been to over 47 countries in the globe, which is probably a lot more than usual.

I guess in a sense - I definitely identify and see myself as an Australian. But [pause] I wouldn't want to just classify myself only as that. I like to think of myself as - it's cheesy, but - a global citizen, a bit more aware.

I think living in different countries, being exposed to different cultures, particularly in places where you are exposed to a lot more people from different nations and so forth. You know living in London was a big impact.

We.... My wife and I got married in Italy. And I think [00:17:00] of the eighty guests we had, all the guests came from about fifteen different countries. That kind of sums up the impact of living abroad and having those different exposures - it had on my life and also my wife's life as well.

[00:17:18] **Quang Pham:** That sounds great. Would you say that you interact with the community a lot during your day to day activities?

[00:17:30] **Timothy Robathan:** I would say I think most of my interaction is probably through my work. With my job, I work pretty closely with a team of

twelve individuals that are all U.S. based - most locally, but we're now hiring remote employees during the pandemic.

But also, we work with universities and colleges throughout the U.S. So that's definitely exposed [00:18:00] me to different cultures within the U.S. We're not just working with a college in Massachusetts, we could be talking to a college in Alabama or California. So it does vary quite a bit.

In terms of Kingston itself, I think just through the group of friends, through schools - definitely our daughter's going to school and pre-school is the biggest impact and exposure to the community. I'd say definitely we've integrated. We became friends with a lot of local business owners and I think Kingston's transformed a lot in the seven years we've been here as well. Particularly the last few years. I would say an influx of people having moved up from New York City.

So having established those relationships with the community from seven years ago almost feels like - it's [00:19:00] kind of funny to think that we're kind of the veterans of Kingston. Although we're not of course, but there's so many new people in the last year or two that we feel like, "Yeah, we've been here a long time." [Laughs] We're really, really, truly part of the community now.

[00:19:15] **Quang Pham:** I see. Okay. That's about it for today. Do you have any questions for me about the program or anything?

[00:19:26] **Timothy Robathan:** No. I... Brian did tell me a little bit about this the other day and so I kind of have an understanding about the partnership with the museum and of course the participation from Bard College.

I have a good understanding, I think.

[00:19:40] **Quang Pham:** Okay. Okay. Thank you so much.

[00:19:42] **Timothy Robathan:** It was a pleasure. Thank you very much.

[00:19:44] **Quang Pham:** Have a good rest of your day.

[00:19:46] **Timothy Robathan:** You too.

[Packing up and leaving room – recording still on]

[00:19:50] **Timothy Robathan:** So, this is the first interview you've done?

[00:19:52] **Quang Pham:** No this is the second one.

[00:19:53] **Timothy Robathan:** Okay.

[00:19:55] **Quang Pham:** I am new to this.

[00:19:56] **Timothy Robathan:** Yeah yeah well, me too. Whereabouts are you from [00:20:00] yourself? Where are you from?

[00:20:03] **Quang Pham:** I'm from Vietnam.

[00:20:05] **Timothy Robathan:** I was almost guessing that.... You know, we travel through South Vietnam when we were living in Australia. Loved by my wife.

[00:20:13] **Quang Pham:** I've been to Australia too. [Inaudible as they exit the room.]