

Creating Legacies: Past, Current and Future

*Submitted by Debra Russell and presented at the
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Introduction

I begin this twenty-minute presentation in a way similar to thanking the First Nations people and acknowledging them as the original owners of the land on which we stand – I want to thank the Deaf communities that have shared their language and culture with me over the past 35 years. I have never graduated from what is known today as an interpreter education program– my learning of language and culture has come from the community members in all of the communities in which I have been privileged enough to live and work. I also want to thank those many CODA's along the way who have also taught me from their experiences. I have been incredibly fortunate and wish to acknowledge that as I talk about legacies.

What is a legacy? By definition it is something that is passed down from one time to another time. It can also be how we remember people, as well as a piece of our heritage or history. Legacies can be positive or negative.

When I think of people who have left an indelible legacy on our field, there are many names I could list. Here are just a few that I would like to acknowledge: Terry Janzen, Jim McDermott, Liz Warren, Karen Malcolm, Gary Malkowski, Christine Wilson, Marguerite Peddigrew, Paul Bourcier, and Phyllis Joynet. Who is on your list?

As you look at the list you may be thinking, “But you forgot someone”- There are many more people who have given their time and talent in order to leave the profession better than when they entered. I have chosen some key people that I wish

to acknowledge for their legacies. I can't name all but to each of whom have made contributions, I honour them and hope they will accept my apologies for not highlighting them here.

Whether you recognize the names or not, those individuals have dramatically shaped our Deaf-interpreter landscape, and have left enduring legacies for us to uncover and learn from. What did they offer? What traits did they show?

I, and AVLIC, begin with Janice Judith Hawkins. AVLIC began as an idea for a national conference of sign language interpreters – an idea that came from Janice Hawkins, CODA extraordinaire. Nearing thirty-five years later we still have a strong organization – thanks to her. When I think about her talents and traits, these words come to mind: mentor, educator, leader, tireless volunteer. She is a builder of people, community, and organizations like AVLIC. She was a founding member of AVLIC and for a time, the AVLIC president. She was also a founding member of and the president of Manitoba Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (MRID), now known as MAVLI - our hosts here at this conference! She is also the only Canadian to have served on the RID board of directors. She chaired our first Evaluations Committee, paving the way to the Canadian Evaluation System. When people think of how Red River Community College started their interpreting program, they understand that Janice was behind that, too. Her legacy is one of service to the Deaf community, mentoring of interpreters and leading us on a path that has been positive. Without Janice there may

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not be AVLIC. Thank you, Janice. When I saw her in action at the founding meeting in Winnipeg I knew that there was something very special about this woman and her energy. Here is a quote from a colleague about Janice:

Janice has been a revered mentor for many interpreters whose careers were forming in the 1970s and 1980s, and can be said to be in some way behind every interpreter's development in Manitoba, as well as for many interpreters across the country.

Meeting Janice was the very first time I saw that interpreting was really possible for me. Before that it had been a mystery, but instantly I saw that it could work. In that moment Janice became my mentor and my inspiration and eventually, I'm so happy to say, my friend. Whenever I reflect on what this field is supposed to be like, I think of Janice.

Micheline Caron is a cherished LSQ interpreter colleague and friend. When I think about her talents and traits, these words come to mind: cultural bridge, educator, committed to standards and quality. She was a founding member of AVLIC, and of the Quebec Affiliate Chapter of interpreters, known as Association Québécoise des Interprètes Francophones en Langage Visuel (AQIFLV) at the time. Micheline had Deaf parents, and she and Paul Bourcier were the bridge to our LSQ colleagues. When Phyllis Joynt organized summer courses for interpreters in the early 1980's, Micheline taught LSQ interpreters while we taught ASL interpreters. She attended the Conference of Interpreter Trainers with us in 1983 and helped establish our network of educators known as CAESLI – the Canadian Association of Educators of Sign Language Interpreters. While she wasn't

the first person to be employed as a sign language interpreter for the Government of Canada, she is the one that many of us associate with increased Translation Bureau standards, excellent working conditions for interpreters, and ensuring events had both ASL and LSQ interpreters working side by side. Her legacy is also one of service to the Deaf community and respecting the quality of LSQ. Thank you, Micheline. Here are a couple of quotes from colleagues about Micheline:

Micheline helped us to see our common issues while respecting and lobbying for equality within the LSQ community.

Her laughter could spread throughout a room in seconds, and her very presence lit up the room!

Next we have Richard Wayne Letourneau, who is noted for his focus, vision and for being the consummate professional. These words reflect the many ways Richard is described: a founding member of AVLIC, and the Alberta Chapter of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (ACRID), serving as president of both organizations at times in his career. Our AVLIC ceremony where the past president presents the in-coming president with the ceremonial gavel was a ritual created by Richard during the 1986 AVLIC conference in Calgary, along with the creation of the AVLIC President's Award. Two of his colleagues and friends stated:

As for his leadership: He is a task oriented, meticulous and organized leader. I think his legacy is especially evident in Alberta - he has left an indelible footprint on our professional organization here.

Let's see... the 5 characteristics I'd use to describe

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Richard are consummate professional, advocate, visionary, focused (remember his campaign for president at the Halifax conference???) and martini-maker extraordinaire. As for his leadership and legacy, he was a selfless and innovative leader. I say that because he was adamant about establishing the President's Award so he could put a spotlight on the accomplishments of others.

Let's move next to Angela Stratiy. Just three of her traits include mentor, creative creator and feminist leader. She is known as the "mother of Deaf Culture" and the same applies to ensuring culture was a strong part of interpreter education. Angela was the first Deaf interpreter coordinator of an interpreter education program and she has influenced hundreds of interpreters with her teaching in the IEP and through her workshops.

Angela is indeed a powerful teacher. She is eloquent, funny, articulate, committed, and knowledgeable. If you own The Canadian Dictionary of ASL, you own a piece of Angela's genius.

Angela's leadership among interpreters and people who are Deaf spans decades. She sees an issue and takes action –the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf (CCSD) grew through her vision and commitment.

A legacy is connecting interpreters and Deaf people, cherishing ASL and Deaf Culture and helping each of us to understand cross-cultural issues.

Bruce Jack is one more of our Deaf educator's who has influenced many interpreters! Bruce was passionate, truthful, accountable and a national historian. Because of that love of history, he was

able to share so much with others. I had missed a flight here in Winnipeg, but Bruce came to pick me up from Terry Janzen's, and in those days, I could still duck on an airplane as they were closing the door! I knew the time was tight, and Bruce was kind enough to drive me. As we drove he began to tell me about the Deaf people who had worked at a Deaf friend's company, Deaf people who had live in this home, what they were like as students at the school for the Deaf, what their contributions to the Deaf community were, and so on. While I missed the flight I learned invaluable tidbits of history behind this vibrant Winnipeg Deaf community. He was the first Deaf teacher at the Manitoba School for the Deaf (MSD), and he also taught interpreters at Red River Community College. He was very fussy and particular about signing – no sloppy signs could be found in interpreters he taught! He was also a tireless volunteer, honoured by the Canadian Association of the Deaf (CAD), for his many contributions. He blazed trails for us and reminded us daily of the importance of sharing the narratives and yes, some of those were very long narratives, based on the histories of Deaf people. Bruce is not forgotten.

Next I turn to Sheila Johnston and honour her traits as an advocate, visionary, builder, and principled person. As we go across the country, Sheila is one who stands out as a quiet woman of action, who hates the spotlight on her, and yet has done so much for our field, beginning her interpreting career by interpreting for her Deaf brother. She is committed to excellence, known for her strict standards that she sets for herself, and helps others to attain. She has been a constant AVLIC supporter and has worked with the CES in a number of roles including as a rater facilitator. She founded the Interpreter Internship Program,

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which is a model program bringing together the talent of Deaf ASL instructors and interpreter coaches with techniques and strategies that take interpreters from graduation to successful community interpreting work. The program is the envy of communities across Canada. She has been active in OASLI for over 30 years, and she continues to serve the Deaf community in significant ways. Sheila's workshops encourage interpreters to think deeply about ASL and language use and then apply that to their work. Thank you, Sheila.

As I look to the East Coast, Myles Murphy is another Deaf leader who has influenced interpreting in Newfoundland and throughout the Maritime region. He was in the first graduating class of the Newfoundland School for the Deaf (NSD) and one of The Rock's first Deaf students to attend Gallaudet University. Active in CAD and CCSD, he has been a tireless fighter for Deaf rights and making sure the perspectives of Newfoundland people were included in any Canadian discussion. He founded the interpreter referral service and helped create a short-term interpreter program with David Still as an instructor. Myles served on The Canadian Dictionary of ASL editorial board of CCSD, and his focus on including Eastern Canadian signs is a credit to his legacy. His positive energy has been visible at this conference – thank you, Myles.

So from these people we can see the traits they have and how they have impacted interpreting, AVLIC, the Deaf community and creating a positive history in a positive time. But have things changed? Have we lost our way? Increasingly we see interpreters who are waiting for what is owed to them, less likely to give back to the community. There seems to be a growing divide in some communities, a divide that

is separating interpreters from other interpreters, causing competition and less collaboration. We see the tension between business and community service models. The divide also is between Deaf people and interpreters; the result of all of this is that it affects our relationships. Relationships that were previously built on friendships and frequent conversation are now slotted as formal agreements on paper and yearly meetings between leaders of organizations. Is it possible for us to rebuild these relationships so as to find our way back to more collaborative communities? To me the answer is: of course! We can do that in several ways, including building and maintaining our relationship with the Deaf community. We can also:

Commit to leadership with integrity and commit to the bettering of the field – think Janice, Micheline, Richard, Sheila, Myles, Bruce, Angela.

As my mentor, Phyllis Joynt, used to say, “Each one, teach one”; we can take action for positive change.

The common factor among the people listed and the seven that I have chosen to highlight here is this: Deaf Heart and Deaf Mind, which is beautifully illustrated by the artwork of Nancy Rourke. Each of us can uncover, discover and/or recover traits from those who have left an enduring legacy, or are creating legacies now. We can model ourselves after those amazing people. But it means that in that discovery-journey we must also examine what Risa Shaw and I have framed as “conceptualization of the task” (Russell, D. & Shaw, R., 2013). What does it mean to provide a meaningful interpretation? What kind of life-long training does it require? What is the impact of my decisions during each and every

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interpreting assignment that shape relationships among interpreters, and between Deaf consumers and interpreters? How do all of those features feed into the power dynamic that is our community of practice? Ann Bishop (2000) writes about becoming an ally when working with marginalized communities, and she suggests there are 6 stages to becoming an ally.

1. Understand roots of oppression
2. Understand different oppressions: similarities & differences
3. Consciousness & healing
4. Working for own liberation
5. Becoming an Ally
6. Maintaining Hope

When I think about maintaining hope, I am very optimistic about our future. Some of the allies that I see leading us forward include Paula Bath, who is a model of “being curious”- she takes her

curiosity to her formal studies and then shares that with interpreters. Nigel Howard, who is influencing Deaf interpreting locally, nationally and internationally. Rhondda Reynolds, a wonderful creative and critical thinker, who is working to create Canada’s first degree in sign language interpreting. Patrick Boudreault, who we saw deliver an amazing keynote on July 10, 2014 on protecting the language rights of all of our sign language communities. Lynn LeBlanc, who models how to blend the business of interpreting with a Deaf heart at the centre of the organization. Laura Henry, another quiet leader, who models life long learning principles in every conversation she has with interpreters and Deaf people. And the list goes on... I hope that each of you will take the time to consider acknowledging all of the people in your local community who have contributed in significant ways, as you think about the positive legacy you will leave on our field.

Russell, D. & Shaw, R. (2013). Interpreting decisions and power: Legal Discourse or Legal Discord? In B. van den Bogaerde, L. Hollman & M. Salammi (eds). Be aware! Power and responsibility in the field of sign language interpreting. Proceedings of the 20th efsli conference, Vienna, Austria 13-16 Sept 2012. (pp. 45-59)..

Ann Bishop is the author - Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression in People (published in 2002, the first edition, Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression, was published in 1994) and Beyond Token Change: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression in Institutions (published in 2005). Both books are published by Fernwood Publishing, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.