

Interviewee: Mary Jane Rose
Interviewer: Kerilyn Anderson
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Abstract: Mary Jane Rose was born in Canada, went to Gallaudet College, and works as a teacher in Worcester, MA. In this interview she discusses what it was like growing up deaf in a family that was all hearing, learning American Sign Language, and attending a residential school for deaf or hard of hearing children. She reflects on the barriers she encountered and why she wanted to become a teacher.

Kerilyn Anderson: What is your name?

Mary Jane Rose: Mary Jane Rose.

KA: And your maiden name was what?

MJR: Mighilly.

KA: That's Irish?

MJR: Yes.

KA: Where were you born?

MJR: In Canada.

KA: Were you born deaf?

MJR: I don't know, we are not really sure, my mother found out that I was deaf around the age of three months old, they assumed, but they wanted to know more, so they brought me for testing over at the Genetics Center, and there they took X-Rays and they wanted to take....and my brain was completely developed, and the result was that it was, but they didn't know what the cause of my deafness was.

KA: Where did you grow up?

MJR: In Canada.

KA: In the same house?

MJR: Yes in the same house.

KA: What did your neighborhood look like?

MJR: It was a very small village, about 2000 people.

KA: Did you have neighbor kids that you played around?

MJR: Oh, yeah. There were many kids the same age all in our area.

KA: Who did you live with growing up?

MJR: My family, my parents and my four siblings.

KA: Are your parents deaf?

MJR: No.

KA: They hear?

MJR: Yes they are all hearing.

KA: Does your mother work?

MJR: My mother works as a bookkeeper.

KA: Does your father work?

MJR: He is an insurance broker.

KA: Do have siblings? How many? How close in age?

MJR: I have my brother, the oldest, there are 11 months between him and I, then I have twin sisters, that are 13 months behind me, and then finally I have one more sister who is one year behind them. So there is a total of five of us in five years.

KA: They are all hearing?

MJR: Yes.

KA: What was the first language you learned?

MJR: American Sign Language, ASL.

KA: Did you learn that first or when did you first start?

MJR: I really began learning it when I was in school, at the age of 5, but before that I

spoke a little, my mother was in contact with a program out in California, The Spencer Tracy Clinic, so before the age of 5, I think for about 2 or 3 years, they were working with the oral method, but then at the age of 5 I was put into a residential school and began signing from that point on.

KA: Do you know any other languages?

MJR: English and ASL.

KA: When did you first learn.....?

MJR: Oh I don't know. My mother says that we were able to communicate but which came first words or signs that I don't know. So once I was put into residential school I began signing and everything was clear from that point but before the age of 5 I'm not sure.

KA: How did you communicate in your home with your parents and your siblings?

MJR: Well, it really changed over time. My family would follow the method that was being taught in the school at the time, which often changed. So as I began growing up, we used the oral method at home, then when I was in middle school, thiswe changed to visual English, which is the same as the Rochester Method, mostly finger selling, so at home we would finger sell. Then later on in high school, I began signing using the Total Communication Method, which was speaking and signing at the same time, so from that point on we used sign language.

KA: Other than your parents, who in your family do you feel closest with?

MJR: I'm close to all my siblings, but the closest was my twin sisters.

KA: Where did you go to school?

MJR: Milton, Ontario. In Canada.

KA: Can you describe your school, what kind of program was the philosophy..... the school?

MJR: A long time ago the school had both the residential and the day program, for the deaf and hard of hearing students in the area. There were about four to five hundred students in the school. So the philosophieschange over time. When I was in high school they would use Total Communication like I previously said, which is speaking and signing at the same time, some of the teachers would just sign, some would just speak, so it was a mix of both. I was in the residential school, I lived in the dorm for 12 years, so there was signing all the time, the dorm advisor signed as well.

KA: Was the communication in your school good for you? Did you feel involved in your

school?

MJR: Oh yes, the school had many opportunities, there were many different activities that I was involved in throughout the years. I also had complete access to everything there. At home it was more thinking and sharing and ideas, but at school there was more one on one attention, and there were so many activities and sports and many different things that we were involved in.

KA: Did you have deaf teachers growing up?

MJR: My vocational teacher, who was also my sewing teacher, was deaf. That was the only one, everyone else was hearing. I think there might have been a counselor that was deaf; no it was just the one, the vocational and sewing teacher.

KA: Did you have a problem with the teacher's communication or did the teachers communicate fine?

MJR: No there wasn't a big issue. Many of the teachers knew sign. When I was in high school, I think it was when I was in high school, yes when I was in high school, there were many deaf interns, so after they graduated though they left, but now there are many more deaf teachers that have come, but before then it was just one. Most of their signing was understandable, we just needed to get used to their individual signing style.

KA: Did you enjoy your schooling?

MJR: Oh yes, I've really enjoyed school. I didn't miss anything at home. It was more important for me to be with the other residential students.

KA: Do you have any unforgettable stories from school? Funny stories, proud, frustrating, anything?

MJR: Well, I don't have the best memory, let me think. I was really very involved with sports throughout the years. I can remember one class project that we had, the teacher assigned it, it was for ECO or the environment, something of the sort, so the assignment was due the following week and it was a lot of work, so as a class, we all decided to skip out, and it was really hard to cut class, we didn't have spare time like other high schools did. So as a group, we had to sneak out and we went into one of the other buildings, and the teacher confronted the principal as to where all the kids went. After a lot of discussion, they understood and they decided that there were no real consequences. It was really hard for us to skip out; we didn't have spare time, or a cafeteria like other high schools had, where we could all sit around the table and eat together.

KA: Looking back, do you wish your school had been different, or do you like it the way it was?

MJR: I wished that when I would have started school signing, and not started off orally. I

feel like I really missed a lot starting off with oral. I also wished that I would have better teachers, or better teaching system. They should have higher expectations. When I went into college, I should have had totally different things that I was exposed to and I noticed that with my family, well I just didn't understand why I hadn't been exposed to things. You know like Shakespeare and there are a lot of different things. It should have been better than that. I think that maybe between communications influenced that, I think now it is better, it's changed a lot from the past.

KA: Where did you go to college?

MJR: I went to Gallaudet University in Washington DC.

KA: What was your major or degrees you have?

MJR: My major was Early Childhood Education and then I have a master's in Parent and Family Programs.

KA: What are someor barriers in your experience in college?

MJR: Interpreters, many of the teachers would call interpreters from the outside, either there weren't enough interpreters, some of the interpreters weren't good at signing, if they didn't have the skills and were a little shaky, and a lot of the classes had a lot of information that needed to be covered and the interpreters weren't skilled enough for it. Gallaudet had a lot of resources for the interpreters.

KA: When did you decide you wanted to be in education?

MJR: Well I decided when I went to Gallaudet, in 1977. I started off with Sociology and Social Work but it wasn't really what I wanted. I wanted Sociology as my major, but a lot of it depended on the grade, and then I left and came back eight years later, in 88, and education had changed then. They didn't have the program, and I think I started.....well it was a graduate level program, and they didn't have an undergrad program. They have had it since then.

KA: Why did you decide on the education field?

MJR: Well I always wanted to work with little children and help them, and when I left for the eight years I was doing various jobs working with parents, but I really wanted to work with children, and so I thought if I became a teacher then I would be working with kids, so that's when I decided to go there.

KA: Where did you work before now, before the School?

MJR: I worked at Deaf Inc., in Boston.

KA: Really?

MJR: Well right after I graduated I met a man and I quickly moved to Boston. They had some opportunities at the high school level, but I didn't want high school, I wanted to work with elementary. They had some jobs working with parents, there wasn't a lot available jobs and Inc., they had temporary work for me, which I needed because my workwere running out. I continued working there until I got pregnant, and after my maternity leave I started teaching and I have been doing that since then.

KA: Why did you choose theSchool? What attracted you there?

MJR: It matched my home schedule. I take care of my kids in the morning, and my husband worked the second shift in the afternoon, so while he is working in the afternoons, I have the opportunity. So I'm only working part-time and I decided to take that.

KA: What kind of programdo they have at theSchool?

MJR: They have a mainstream program there, setup in all different classrooms.

KA: What does your classroom look like?

MJR: In my class, I have three students, a third grader, a fourth grader and a fifth grader, and the three of them are.....Before that I had 55 students at school, but a few years ago the Worcester Department of Education, they made cuts and they decided that all the students who were out of Worcester to pull them out of the school to make the classroom smaller andthe numbers. I think it was a good decision to separate the classrooms with the.... to pull out the hard of hearing with the deaf students that better fit their needs. So my three students, the fifth grade student ended up transferring to a different school, so I have a lot of individual time with the two students that I have.

KA: Where's your teaching.....? How do you try to teach your deaf students?

MJR: Really, I try to avoid, to setting up, any kind of a program.....I like to look, I like to look at the....individually and focus on their needs. It's always a different environment and I like to just do whatever is the best for them to improve. My prospective on it is, like...one or two years ago I had a hard of hearing student, and I pulled an interpreter just to give that student full access.

KA: Your experience as a deaf student growing up, how does that.....just kidding....strike that....Your experience in education growing up how does it effect your teaching now?

MJR: Well I'm not teaching oral. Today I feel I have better resources. I have different strategies now, there is more research connected with special education and a lot of variations, and before then there weren't any strategies andto help improve the students needs.

KA: Did your work environment change, did it stay the same?

MJR: Do you mean at theSchool?

KA: Yes, theSchool.

MJR: The school itself or me?

KA: The school itself.

MJR: Well, really I don't know. The Special Education Department in Worcester, I'd like to see that stay open and encourage the students, I'd really like to see it open up to the hard of hearing students, all over the area to come in. I think it's better for the students for the focus and the socializing and just for self-esteem, giving each other support, and the more kids there are, the more support they have for each other.

KA: Growing up did you have a role model that was very important to you?

MJR: Well, my school didn't have a lot of deaf role models that a lot of people look up to; all in all you do have a lot. When I graduated in Canada, and I was working here in the United States, there were a lot of different discussions how to encourage students, and how to motivate them, especially at the high school level, there were a few of the deaf interns there, which was good, just needing new contact and sharing information and new ideas. Do you know Linda McGlaulin, a Robertthose two were older.....

KA: Any other important notes you want to add?

MJR: No.

KA: Thank you again.

MJR: Thank you for inviting me.