

Thursday, Sept. 24 - "Honouring the Deaf Elders"

[Slide: Wavefront logo + IWD logo]

[Jodi appears]

Hello! Welcome back to day four of International Week of the Deaf (IWD) in Vancouver, BC, Canada. I'm Jodi Birley, Manager of Translation Services and Community Engagement. Yesterday, we celebrated International Day of Sign Languages and learned about the impact that the power of the media has on delivering messages to a wider audience on the importance of sign language preservation and for more exposure. Prior to all of the technological advances and expansion of the media to include Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, work was being done by our Deaf, DeafBlind, and IBPOC pioneers (elders). They began the hard work years ago, advocating for our sign language rights, preserving and protecting our mother language so that we can continue to speak it to this day. If it was not for them, we wouldn't have signing rights nor accessibility to closed captioning, TTY (now videophone), telecommunication relay services (now VRS), sign language interpreting services, and so forth. But now, as you know, we are in a world of fast-paced technology with shorter attention spans, where it can be easy to forget the people who passionately carried the torch for us so that we can have our freedom of expression in our first language. We must take the time to acknowledge, to thank and to promise our elders that we will follow in their footsteps and keep the torch alive. We are dedicating part of today's episode with a video tribute from the Deaf Youth as one of the many ways to honour our elders with thanks and appreciation for their advocacy, which paved the way for us today.

[play video tribute to Deaf elders by Deaf youth]

[Bree Sproule, Kelowna, BC]

Hello, my name is Bree Sproule. I was born and raised in Kelowna, BC.

[David Burnat, Edmonton AB]

Hello! Let me introduce myself, my name is David Burnat. I am from Edmonton, Alberta.

[Kamil Burnat, Edmonton, AB]

Hello, my name is Kamil Burnat. I am from Edmonton.

[Alanda McLeod, Prince Albert, SK]

Hello, my name is Alanda. I am from Saskatchewan.

[Karli Stephenson, Winnipeg, MB]

Hello, my name is Karli Stephenson. I was born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

[Chris Daeninck, Winnipeg, MB]

My name is Christopher Daeninck and I'm from Winnipeg.

[Justin Bergeron, Thunder Bay, ON]

Hello! My name is Justin Bergeron and I am from Thunder Bay, Ontario.

[Alessa Amorim, Milton, ON]

Hi! My name is Alessa Amorim. I am from Milton, Ontario.

[Andrew Stadnicki, Toronto, ON]

Hello! My name is AJ-Andrew Stadnicki. I was born, raised and still live in GTA the Greater Toronto Area.

[Isabella Nimeck, Toronto, ON]

Hello, my name is Isabella Nimeck. I am from Toronto, Ontario.

[Stéphanie Lamy-Therrien, Trois-Rivières, QC]

Hello, my name is Stéphanie Lamy-Therrien. I am from Trois-Rivières, Québec.

[Kamil Burnat, President, Deaf Youth Canada]

I want to thank the Deaf elders and recognize their hard work over many years. WOW. Very inspiring. Without them there would be no captioning, no VRS, no deaf schools, no deaf club, no deaf books, no deaf dictionary. Imagine if we didn't have all of that. We have to thank the elders and look back at those who did the work and recognize them for that.

[Chris Daeninck]

I want to thank the Deaf leaders and Deaf elders who have taught and exposed me to the culture and shared their experiences of the many challenges that they faced. I am amazed by their experiences from the past and the tough times they faced using ASL. I feel fortunate to be in this day and age to have access.

[Bree Sproule]

I want to thank the surrounding BC Deaf Elders' community for their unbelievably lasting hard work from back then to now.

[Isabella Nimeck]

We need to appreciate the Deaf elders, from long ago to now, who have preserved sign language and thank you to those who did the work. Abbé Charles-Michel de l'Épée who was the first person to start up a Deaf school in France and all of the other things that happened after... it is important to keep passing on that history and those stories. We need to keep telling, exposing, and educating the hearing population to see that Deaf people can do anything and that sign language is a benefit.

[Alanda McLeod]

I want to thank them who supported, advocated, and made that happen for the Deaf youth to have a future. Without the language, how do we express ourselves, learn, and communicate? Signing is important.

[Alessa Amorim]

Now I would like to thank Deaf elders. They have taught us and I look up to them as role models. They have also taught us to make an effort and that signing is beautiful.

[Justin Bergeron]

If it wasn't for Deaf Ontario Now and deaf individuals who believed in bilingual education, I wouldn't be here.

I was given an opportunity to grow up in a bilingual education environment and I have the access to both ASL and English. This has opened up so many opportunities for me and I am really grateful for that.

[Karli Stephenson]

If it wasn't for the people at my Deaf Pre-school, SMD, I wouldn't be who I am today.

From Birth to the age of 2 my parents had no idea that I was Deaf. When I was 2, they found out I was Deaf and they were shocked because I was the only Deaf person in my entire family. My parents weren't sure what to do.

I entered pre-school and was able to be around other Deaf children. There were also many Deaf elders at the pre-school. I distinctly remember 2 special Deaf elders who had an impact on me and my parents and they had an impact on my identity, who I was as a Deaf person. These 2 people were Barb Zimmer and Teresa Fleming. Even now my dad talks about Barb Zimmer and the impact she had on me and my family. She was so welcoming and was able to alleviate my parents' fears about having a Deaf daughter. She made them feel welcomed and showed them what the Deaf community and Deaf culture was all about. Honestly it was a very rich experience for me.

[David Burnat]

As for, Deaf school, I went from Grade 1- 12 and went through that journey and incorporated all that learning- every day into my daily life. The staff, teachers, students, all touched my heart. Thank you.

[Bree Sproule]

I grew up in a hearing family. Many of the Deaf elders in BC were willing to come all the way here and teach my family and I how to sign, use ASL. They also helped me to learn how to become independent and accepting of who I am. They are amazing role models. Not only that, when I was mainstreamed growing up I did not receive the same level of accessible education as others around me. My family was unsure what to do or how to advocate and interact, overcome barriers. The community was very happy to come and meet, stand behind, support, and advocate to make sure I got the same level of education. Really, wow! I'm lucky and say thank you.

[Andrew Stadnicki]

If it wasn't for those Deaf elders who have advocated for more accessibility I wouldn't be here working as a financial advisor. Because of their investment with their time and energy to advocate I now have access to bilingual education, excellent qualified interpreters, VRS services, teaching skills, advocacy skills.

[Isabella Nimeck]

One of my favorite stories is, and told from someone I look up to and needs to be preserved is from David Peikoff. He was born in Russia and later moved to Western Canada. He used sign

language and advocated throughout his lifetime. There was a situation in Vancouver, BC that he heard about where they were saying that Deaf people could not drive after an incident where a Deaf person hit the police. They said Deaf people weren't allowed to drive, so David helped in advocating.

I love this part of the story. I couldn't help it but chuckle when David asked if hearing people can drive blindfolded. The judge was flabbergasted and then decided to allow Deaf people to drive.

[Kamil Burnat]

It was worth it because now I can watch tv with captions, text, VRS, read Deaf books, history, which is all so important.

[Andrew Stadnicki]

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize and thank those Deaf elders who have made a difference in today's society, whether it be small or big changes.

[Bree Sproule]

If not for them, I probably wouldn't have gone to university to get an education and become a professional today. Maybe I wouldn't be here. Today, I value my community so much that I will always remember them going forward.

[Justin Bergeron]

From now and on, we shall fight for advancement of bilingual education beyond expectations for future generations.

[Karli Stephenson]

I am so proud to be Deaf, I am proud of my own language, my first language, ASL.

[Stéphanie Lamy-Therrien]

Without the TraduSigne team, my participation in the 2014 Canadian Deaf Youth Leadership Camp (CDYLC) would have been very difficult since the majority of campers used ASL and I was a beginner. My first language is LSQ, so the present interpreters were very supportive to me. Since this camp, I have practiced a lot and had an incredible journey.

Now I can be involved in the Deaf community in Canada equally in ASL and LSQ.

I am proud of this and I can never thank the TraduSigne team enough.

Thanks again!

[Andrew Stadnicki]

Now I am in a position where I can make a difference in Deaf peoples' lives. I can teach them how to improve their overall financial well-being and financial knowledge and literacy.

[Karli Stephenson]

I recently gave birth to my beautiful, almost 8 month old daughter and she is Deaf. I am so thrilled to show her what the Deaf Community and Culture is and to show her to be proud of her own identity, the same as I am.

[Alanda McLeod]

Now I've become a role model to the First Nations Deaf in the Northern area and communities.

[David Burnat]

I have Deaf parents, siblings, grandparents and they aren't fully involved in my life. At the Deaf club, when I go I have such respect and honor for those Deaf elders who have rich stories, their advice, their protection and experience that become tools that I am still using today. Those tools I will hand down to the newer generations and hope it continues to be passed down. As these grandparents pass away their stories stay in my heart forever.

[Kamil Burnat]

It is important to tell them, to express to them how proud we are and show them how much we look up to them so that they feel good and can give us more tips, advice and we can have better relationships with elders and youths. I think there is a disconnect because we are focused on our lives and our journeys. We are more independent and spread out. We still need to thank the Deaf community and the older Deaf people for all the work they have done. Hats off to you.

[back to Jodi]

That was beautiful! Thank you to all Deaf youth ambassadors for sharing your gratitude in Canada! Here in BC, Wavefront Centre has created a special tribute for someone special in our local community to sincerely thank him for his years of dedication, love and talents with Wavefront Centre.

[play short video featuring Eugeniu]

[Janice Lyons]

Hello, my name is Janice Lyons or JJ, preferably JJ.

[Susan Masters]

Hello, my name is Susan Masters. I worked at WIDHH from 1977 until my retirement in 2018. I started as an interpreter and was promoted to Head of Interpreting Services in 1981, I continued as Head of Interpreting until 2005 when I was appointed to the position of Executive Director.

[Grace Shyng]

Hello, my name is Grace Shyng and I'm the Head of Audiology at Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility and the former Interim Executive Director.

I've known Eugeniu for the past decade. I'm honoured to call him my friend.

Every time I see Eugeniu, we've always exchanged a happy hello. We talk about the weather, flowers, his Art. My sign language is basic but we always understand each other. His expressive and his mood is always uplifting.

[Janice Lyons]

Eugeniu moved from Moldova (Russia). I was very lucky to meet him. Eugeniu has many talents and skills, including working in sports in Moldova before moving to Canada to enjoy retirement

with his wonderful wife. Eugeniu is very friendly despite coming from another country where the language is different. Eugeniu is a talented artist. He painted rocks, gave me one, and I was amazed.

[Susan Masters]

I first met Eugeniu around 2005. I remember he made a request to meet with me as the new ED. Eugeniu wanted permission to use Brodie Hall to hold weekly Chess gatherings. He wanted to bring a new social event to the Vancouver Deaf community.

I was soon to learn that this kind of community spirit was normal for Eugeniu. He was always looking for ways to develop and nurture culture and beauty in those around him.

[Grace Shyng]

Eugeniu. Gardner, artist, neighbour, friend, a truly kind person with a generous creative spirit.

[Janice Lyons]

I met Eugeniu at WIDHH where Eugeniu was responsible for gardening, mowing grass, raking, taking care of the trees, trimming and planting flowers. As a volunteer Eugeniu purchased and planted the flowers to make WIDHH look good and contributed his framed artwork of the old building. Stunning!

[Susan Masters]

He began to offer suggestions on how to improve WIDHH's flower beds, lawn care and general appearance and I soon realized that he had the experience and the eye for landscaping so I offered him a paid position to be WIDHH'S groundskeeper.

His artistic eye served us well. As I grew to know him better he shared his art portfolio with me and I saw what a talented artist he is. I commissioned him to design a Christmas card for WIDHH and to complete his painting of the WIDHH West 7th Avenue. His designs and paintings were fantastic!

[Grace Shyng]

One day he brought in the most beautiful painting of our new building. It took my breath away. When we shared the image with our staff, everyone and I mean everyone, their jaws dropped in amazement. He is truly a gifted artist. We are so blessed to have Eugeniu part of our Wavefront family.

[Susan Masters]

Eugeniu also had a "passion project" for WIDHH and the Vancouver Deaf Community; he wanted to put together a collection of artefacts dealing with the history of Deaf people in BC. Eugeniu wanted to display the pictures and trophies of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities as well as the technology used and sometimes invented by Deaf and Hard of Hearing people; old teletype machines, doorbell systems, vintage hearing aids. He wanted

WIDHH to house this museum, but that was not possible as we were in the process of relocating to a new location.

[Grace Shyng]

When we moved to our new location in Mount Pleasant, Eugeniu continued to caretake our front lawn and while we didn't have a garden anymore, he still made sure our grounds were clean and well-tended.

Thank you Eugeniu for all your wonderful years looking after our building on West 7th and now here on Quebec Street. Thank you for sharing all your beautiful art with us. Wavefront Centre is so lucky to have you in our life and I'm truly grateful for your friendship.

[Susan Masters]

I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to know and work with this truly talented individual, Eugeniu.

[Christopher T. Sutton]

Eugeniu, I have been really impressed by your commitment to Wavefront Centre for many years. To build a community where we simply need people involved is inspiring. Your commitment, story, and contributions to Wavefront Centre everyday is fantastic. I thank you.

[Janice Lyons]

I hope to see you around again. ILY!

[back to Jodi]

Don't stop today honouring our elders, it is a lifetime journey of continuously expressing our appreciation and gratitude. We can do our part to carry the torch for our elders by sharing their stories, their sweat and tears with our Youth who can in turn, share globally through one to several clicks. Stay tuned tomorrow as we are called to action to share our own inspiring stories, passions, and advocacy efforts through various media platforms. Through the power of the media, learn how and why the #whyIsign campaign has had and continues to have a powerful impact on all individuals including Deaf children, youth, families, and elders. Thank you for watching with us today and see you tomorrow!

[Slide: Wavefront logo / www.wavefrontcentre.ca]

[end of video]