

Interviewee: Lillian MacWhinnie
Interviewees: Chelsea Vanacore and Brittany Michelson
College of the Holy Cross
Interpreters: Sarah Clinkenbeard and Tyler Nelson
Northeastern University
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Abstract: Lillian MacWhinnie is a 67-year-old widow. She was born Deaf into an all-hearing family in Niagara Falls, NY. Lillian has moved to many locations throughout her life including New York, Ohio, New Hampshire. For the past 28 years, Lillian has continued to reside in Worcester, Massachusetts. Growing up, she attended three different schools for the Deaf. After graduating from the Buffalo School for the Deaf, Lillian joined the workforce. She married and raised five hearing children; the eldest works for Community Enterprises helping Deaf people find work and facilitating communication between the Deaf and Hearing. Lillian is involved with the Deaf senior citizen community in Worcester. Currently, Lillian works part-time for Family Services where she assists the elderly with cleaning, shopping, and feeding.

The person we are interviewing is Lillian MacWhinnie. The Holy Cross interpreters are Chelsea Vanacore and Brittany Michelson. The Northeastern interpreters are Sarah Clinkenbeard and Tyler Nelson.

Hi, my name is Brittany Michelson. My name is Chelsea Vanacore. We are students at Holy Cross and we're both seniors. So what are we interviewing for? We are interviewing for the Women's Worcester history project. So what is this for? This is for women who are born in Worcester, women who have grown up in Worcester, women who work in Worcester, or any woman who is connected to Worcester. So I'll begin.

Chelsea Vanacore: What is your name?

Lillian McWhinnie: Lillian McWhinnie

CV: When were you born?

LM: June 8th, 1942

CV: Where were you born?

LM: I was born in Niagara Falls, New York.

CV: OK, where do you live?

LM: Before or...

CV: Before or now.

LM: I did live in Buffalo and I went to school in Buffalo. Then I moved to Waltham, Massachusetts and then moved – wow, I did move to many different places – then to Ohio and New Hampshire. My father was frequently ill and we just followed him to take care of him but now I reside for here for almost, gosh, twenty-eight years here in Worcester.

CV: So your connection to Worcester is what? Your connection to Worcester, what is it? You live here. Oh right.

LM: Here, I work here and I also raised my family here.

CV: OK, are your parents deaf or hearing?

LM: Oh no, both of my parents can hear and all five of my children are hearing as well.

CV: Oh. So tell me a story about your growing up, please.

LM: Well, I was born deaf and I, when I was two I was sent away to school for the – to a school for the deaf in Buffalo and I learned sign language. When I was growing up, I was encouraged to use it and once I moved from Massachusetts to the Columbus School for the Deaf, I did stay in the dorm all week and commuted on the weekends back to my home in New Hampshire. But at the other school that I attended, I stayed all year round and only went home for the holidays. For Christmas, or Easter, many of those vacations. Being at home was kind of boring; there wasn't a lot of deaf people or a large deaf community so I was always excited to go back to school. And I did end up graduating from Buffalo School for the Deaf and after that I needed to search for a job so I moved to Waltham for work and then I did move here to Worcester and I've stayed here.

CV: Thank you. Now did you go to college?

LM: Oh no, I went to business school for about one month, for keypunch, to be a keypunch operator – do you know that? But then I did change my job to be a machine sorter where we just sort through the papers. God, being a keypuncher was really boring.

CV: OK. Now do you have any problems in education?

LM: No, fine, I had a great education. It was really good but because I was moving new schools so frequently, for example in the Buffalo School for the Deaf, it was really easy and then when I went to Ohio, it was a lot harder and I was held back a class but it didn't really phase me and I kept going.

CV: OK, thank you. Now, do you work outside the home now?

LM: Now, what do you mean?

CV: Now, do you work now?

LM: Oh, I – yea, I do work part time. I help elderly people in their homes. I clean their houses, for example, or go grocery shopping for them. Sometimes I even prepare their dinner.

CV: Oh, OK. Who do you work for or with?

LM: I work for Family Services.

CV: Now, how did you find the job?

LM: I actually found the job through my daughter.

CV: Oh, OK. Do you want to come in now? We're going to switch. Thank you.

Brittany Michelson: Are you married?

LM: Oh, married, yea but my husband did pass away.

BM: Aw, I'm sorry.

LM: It's OK, I'm a widow now.

BM: When did he pass away?

LM: Back in 1998.

BM: I'm sorry. My grandmother passed away.

LM: I'm sorry

BM: I mean my grandfather passed away and my grandmother is still very upset and it's been two years now. What did he do for work?

LM: Who?

BM: Your husband

LM: Oh, before he passed. Oh, well, he had many jobs but when he was younger, he worked for the Air Force. He was a chef; he did all the cooking for the soldiers but when we moved to Worcester, he was a chef, as well, but his last job was in Denny's, you know. He was a really good cook but he doesn't work anymore. He's in heaven, I really do miss him, miss him a lot.

BM: Did you have children?

LM: Yes, I have five children. I have three boys and two girls.

BM: How old are they?

LM: The oldest one is forty-three, then forty-two, forty-one years old, thirty-nine, and then thirty-seven. That's a pretty big gap there.

BM: Wow, you must have a lot of grandchildren.

LM: Oh, yea. I have nine grandchildren.

BM: How old are they?

LM: Oh, wow, how old are they? The oldest is gotta be about twenty-six then the next one is twenty-four then twenty-two, I have so many more – I really couldn't tell ya.

BM: Oh, that's fine.

LM: They live in Cape Cod and I don't see them that much but my oldest daughter, I see her the most and her family. Fairly often because they reside here in Worcester as well. My oldest daughter was born here, no, she was born, no she was born in Waltham.

BM: Are any of your children deaf?

LM: No.

BM: They're all hearing?

LM: Yes, they're all hearing.

BM: Have you ever had any communication problems with your children?

LM: My first children growing up, the first two I recall explaining a little bit of sign language to them but we mainly used what we called home sign language which is most gesturing: 'Mom, I need food' 'Mom, get me water'. Stuff like that. But when we started signing, they started using sign language as they got older, they started to acquire more skills but the last four really don't, they aren't as skilled as the oldest one. My oldest daughter is the best at ASL.

BM: Please tell me a story about your children.

LM: My oldest daughter, she works for Community Enterprises. She helps deaf people find jobs, say if they have a problem working in the workforce with their supervisor or boss – what she'll do is come into the situation and ask each party what's going on or

what the problem is and then try to remedy the situation. Basically helps with communication between both parties. But what my other four children do? I really couldn't tell you. I really only know about my oldest daughter.

BM: Are you involved with the deaf community?

LM: Oh yes, I'm involved with Worcester Senior Citizens.

BM: What's your favorite memory?

LM: I like to play Bingo and go out and talk with friends. I really like to go on fun trips as well. Just have a good time.

BM: What do you like to do outside of work?

LM: Like? Like at night after working you mean?

BM: Yes.

LM: Sometimes I like to go shopping or – gee, I don't know, I guess most of the time I just go home and watch some TV.

BM: Has being deaf caused any problems for you with different experiences that you've had?

LM: Not really.

BM: Because of our project, we wanted to know what you would like to tell women. The women of Worcester.

LM: I'm sorry what do you mean?

BM: What do you want to tell the women of Worcester?

LM: Gee, I really don't know.

BM: Do you want people know different things about Worcester?

LM: I'm sorry, I don't know.