

Interviewee: Brenda Rennie
 Interviewers: Katelyn Duffy and John Ringwood,
 College of the Holy Cross
 Interpreters: Laura Pricket and Andrew Prior,
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Abstract: Brenda Rennie is a 44-year old Deaf woman from Worcester, Massachusetts; she is a vibrant, high-energy advocate for the deaf. She was born in Ohio to hearing parents and quickly became a dedicated user of American Sign Language and a member of the culturally Deaf community. Brenda had a happy childhood, she was lucky enough to be surrounded by friends and family that were willing to communicate with her using many different methods; she is perfectly content with being Deaf and, in fact, is extremely proud. Brenda was educated in a residential school for the deaf in Ohio and then proceeded to attend Gallaudet University. Although she did not graduate from Gallaudet, she later achieved an advanced degree from Northern Essex Community College in Haverhill, MA. She moved around the country to several places such as Washington D.C., Maryland, Virginia, and Minnesota before settling down in Massachusetts. Currently, Brenda works as an Independent Living services advocate at the Center for Living and Working in Worcester, Massachusetts. Her profession involves serving as a resource for deaf or hard of hearing individuals in the Worcester area who are in need of assistance in finding housing, food stamps, skills training, and more. Brenda also volunteers for the Our Deaf Sisters' Center.

KD	Hello, my name is Katy Duffy. I am a senior at Holy Cross. The name sign is HC. We're here interviewing for the Worcester Women's History Project.
BR	Hello.
KD	Hi, what's your name?
BR	My name is Brenda Rennie
KD	Ok, where were you born
BR	I was born in Ohio. Just north of Cleveland, that's where I was born.
KD	How old are you?
BR	Ohhh, I'm really old. No, I'm just kidding you, I'm 44.
KD	Were you born deaf?
BR	Yep, I was born deaf. My mom became sick with Rubella. You know, it's the same as German measles. So my mom became sick, and I was born deaf.
KD	Which form of communication do you use?

BR	Oh definitely ASL. That's my first language.
KD	Oh, I see. How would you... identify yourself?
BR	My identity?
KD	Yes, your identity.
BR	My identity what, may be deaf, hard of hearing.... I definitely identify as deaf. I'm a proud member of the deaf community.
KD	Great. What meaning has your deafness had in your life? With your friends, family, work...
BR	I'm happy I'm deaf. I really have good relationships with my friends and my family. My friends and I communicate using ASL. With my parents, sometimes we would use gestures, sometimes we would write notes to each other, we had a lot of different ways of communicating, but I'm really happy I'm deaf.
KD	Has your deafness affected your work?
BR	Deafness affected my work... No! I work for a deaf agency here, called the Center for Living and Working. Also knows as CLW. It's right nearby in Worcester. We provide services for deaf people in the area. So, no my deafness hasn't affected my work.
KD	Where'd you go to school?
BR	I went to a deaf residential school that was located in Ohio. The school name was St. Reda's School for the Deaf. I grew up there.
KD	Did you go to college?
BR	Hmmm... lemme think. Many different colleges. First I went to Gallaudet University. I was there for five years. I didn't graduate from there though. I partied and got into all kinds of trouble. When I realized I hadn't gotten a degree yet, so then I went back to school at Northern Essex Community College. That's in Haverhill, Massachusetts. I was there for two or three years, then got a degree in deaf studies.
KD	Who supported you in school?
BR	What do you mean support?
KD	Support. Who helped you when you were growing up? Who did you admire?
BR	I admired my mom. She and I were really close. She supported me... A long time ago, my parents wanted to try and read lips, and use speech. And they wanted me to use hearing aids. I did not wanna do either of those. I waived those hearing aids goodbye and I started signing. So, my parents, they started to learn sign language. My mom, she was a better signer than my dad. My mom and I were really close.
KD	Tell me about your parents, your community. Maybe a story.
BR	Oh, ok a story. Well my parents were divorced, I lived with my mom. I would go to the residential school, and then when I came home, I lived with my mom. We were really close. She died at a really young age, of cancer. She was only 53. After that, my dad and I got a lot closer, but still, it was different.
KD	Ok. Now we're gonna change interviewers.

BR	Ok, thank you.
KD	Thank you!
JR	Hi, my name is John Ringwood, and I'm here to help with this interview for the Worcester Women's History Project. Hi there.
BR	Hi!
JR	So, where've you lived? Initially, you lived in Ohio, right? Anywhere else?
BR	Yes, when I finished living in Ohio, I went to Gallaudet University. Stayed in Washington D.C., then I went to Maryland, then I went to Virginia... Then I moved to Minnesota! That wasn't nice, so then I came to Massachusetts.
JR	Oh.
BR	Oh, I've been here for fifteen or sixteen years.
JR	So, you work at CLW, right?
BR	Yes, I work at CLW.
JR	What do you do there?
BR	Ok, me... there are three people. I work with the deaf population that comes for help. We help them with their houses, if they need help getting food stamps, oh; we do a lot of different things, budgeting, job training, we also chat with these people and socialize. Also we provide advocacy for them. So if they're having medical problems, or interpreter problems, we help them with that. There's another staff member who focuses on the hard of hearing population. Most of those are senior citizens. Then there's <i>another</i> staff member in Framingham that works with the deaf community out there.
JR	How did you come to work at CLW? Why did you choose to work there?
BR	Ya know, I really consider myself to be an advocate. So when I saw that job opening, I thought, just go ahead with it! I've been working there for four years.
JR	Oh ok, do you volunteer anywhere.
BR	Volunteering now, let's see... I am <i>busy</i> . Sometimes, my friends will call, or email and they'll need help with something, and yea, I'll help them out. I'm also on the board at Our Deaf Sister Center.
JR	Oh, yes.
BR	I'm the treasurer. This organization helps women who are victims of domestic violence. The organization's going along pretty well. I hope it's really gonna take off soon, and that members of the deaf community are really gonna know they can turn to us for help.
JR	When you're not working, do you have any hobbies, anything you do for fun?
BR	Hmm. That's hard. I have a stepson, he is deaf and he lives with me. Most of the time, the two of us try and go out and do things together. We go out and do different things. My hobbies, well, I'm addicted to the computer, my pager, facebook, love facebook, it's so cool that you can be connected to so many people. I love to read People Magazine, and I also like to watch TV.
JR	Tell me about a hard time in your life. What did you do? How did you handle it?

BR	Growing up, I really didn't have a hard life. I went to a residential school where all my friends could sign and we just communicated really well. After that, I worked at a deaf group home, so that great also. Ummm... the hardest thing in my life would probably be when my mom died. She was just so young; 53. It happened within 6 months. We just lost her really quickly. That was hard.
JR	What does it mean to you to be successful
BR	Well, success. Success means that you really can do it. Success means that you can, you don't sit back when you fail, but no, you keep going. It's hard, but you keep going.
JR	If you could say one thing, or... a few things to women, what would you say?
BR	Tell women about what?
JR	What would you say to women in Worcester...
BR	About success?
JR	...or people in general. ... Yea.
BR	That you can do it. Don't just sit back and let things pass you by. If you need help, look for it. Deaf people can do it. Don't allow other hearing people and mainstream society to look down on you. Push it aside and go on. Women have power.
JR	Do you have a legacy? If you could uh... shape your legacy, what would it be?
BR	Ooh legacy.... Really the president at Gallaudet University; I really admire him. He is the president, and he's deaf. There are a lot of hearing presidents all over, but seeing a deaf president, I know that deaf people can succeed. They can be leaders. It's possible
JR	We're finished. Thank you so much!
BR	Thank you, it was a good interview.