



WASLI Newsletter

WASLI is committed to the advancement of sign language interpreting world wide

Editorial

WASLI went on a search to find who are the sign language interpreters who live the furthest south and the furthest north in the world. We think we have found them, they both are female, one lives and works in the South Island of New Zealand and the other lives and works in the Nunavut inside the Arctic Circle. Both agreed to be interviewed and for the following stories to be told. I had every intention of including a report on sign language interpreting in the Asia Pacific Region but decided in the end to dedicate this issue to all interpreters who working 'in the extreme'. If you know of any interpreter who lives further south than Hayley or further north than Judy, do let us know. We are also interested to bring you stories from interpreters who work along the Equator. If you are one of these, contact me. **Zane Hema (Editor)**

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MEET 'HAYLEY FROM THE SOUTH' AND 'JUDY FROM THE NORTH'



Name: Hayley Best
 Lives: Dunedin
 Country: New Zealand
 Latitude/
 Longitude: 45.87S/170.50E
 Population: 122,200 (Census 2006)



Name: Judy Jeffreys
 Lives: Arctic Bay, Nunavut
 Country: Canada
 Latitude/
 Longitude: 73.02N/85.10W
 Population: 690 (2006)

Tell us a little about you and how you became an Interpreter? (and what is your current status?)

HAYLEY:

How did I become an interpreter? I'm not actually sure my Dad is deaf but is oral and uses home signs. I met a Deaf woman who set up the Deaf school and an attached hostel in Fiji when I was 14. I decided then that I would learn sign language and go there ... so I did. I did a year at Victoria University in Wellington and did some sign language papers just for interest. I decided I wanted to carry that on so I moved up to Auckland for the two-year Sign Language Interpreters course at Auckland University of Technology.

I have been interpreting for three and a half years now. After I graduated I worked in my hometown of Wellington for one year before being offered a job at the Otago University in Dunedin. I've been down here for 2 years now. I'm currently a full-time tertiary interpreter but as the only qualified SLIANZ (Sign Language Interpreters Association of NZ) member south of Christchurch I am on call for community work and that includes travelling around Otago and Southland where there are no interpreters. I have close ties with the Deaf community and developing interpreting profession in Suva and plan to move to Fiji in a couple of years.

I'm on the committee of SLIANZ and find this a great way to keep in touch with what is going on nationally. I also have an interpreter mentor (based in Auckland) and a number of other interpreters I can go to if I have questions about anything.

JUDY:

The traditional Inuit name of Arctic Bay is Ikpiarjuk, which means 'the pocket'.

"Top of the world to you..."

My interest in sign language started at a young age when befriending a deaf girl one summer while away from home. We lost touch after she moved to a school for the deaf. Almost 10 years later and while on a different career path, I stumbled across sign language night classes at a college. From there I applied and was accepted into an ASL- ENG (American Sign Language – English) Interpreter programme at Cambrian College in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada. There I completed the one-year Pre-Interpreter Programme and three year ASL-ENG Interpreter Programme, graduating a Cambrian Scholar of the Interpreter Training Programme in 2001. Throughout my college years and to the present, I have remained an active member of my provincial and national interpreting associations: the Ontario Association of Sign Language Interpreters (OASLI) and Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada (AVLIC). I have been a member-at-large for OASLI and was the Co-chair of the Auction committee for the AVLIC 2006 conference held in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

I worked in Southern Ontario, Canada in various settings with my focus on educational interpreting in the K-12 setting. I became involved with the union, which represented a group of professionals within our school board. I wanted to provide "a voice" for our staff interpreters. That led me to the negotiating team and a new contract. This involved educating and advocating to avoid such labels and titles as "helper, educational aid, paraprofessional, tutor" or other duties often placed on educational interpreters. We were fortunate to secure "Interpreter" as our title as well as clarify our role. We were placed in a category among other professionals, were paid accordingly, and secured an appropriate benefits package. We advocated and received regular prep time, overtime, and even had opportunities for team interpreting through hiring freelance interpreters or teaming with other staff interpreters.

After my positive experience in the K-12 setting with this particular school board, I started my venture north. I applied for my current position as interpreter after receiving a posting through AVLIC.

My trip to the High Arctic became an adventure! Little did I realise that moving to the Arctic was done on "Arctic Time" and the weather dictated when you would arrive. What should have been a 10-hour trip, turned out to be a 12-day journey! I thought this was an interesting demonstration of Canada's diversity, since I hadn't even left its borders!



TELL US WHAT IT IS LIKE LIVING AND WORKING WHERE YOU ARE?

HAYLEY:

COLD! But on the positive side this town is filled with incredible Southern men and one has decided he wants to marry me so it was worth moving down here.

Dunedin is one of the most beautiful cities I have ever been too. It has a stunning peninsula and is close to all the great walks and ski fields in the South Island. It is freezing in winter and can be a bit treacherous driving around on ice. Everyone tells me to never brake on ice but no one has actually told me how to stop. But there is always something new to see and I still love exploring the coastline and the hills.



Interpreting in the cold means I always have to do warm up activities beforehand to avoid injury. I completely love my work and I appreciate doing community work since a lot of my time is spent at the University.

I love the travel and the different people I work with. In saying this, I find it difficult working all by myself. I really miss the linguistic support you can get from working in a team (not to mention the breaks) and sometimes you can feel obliged to take work on that you might not choose to do if you knew there were other interpreters around that could do it. It can also be difficult being the only 'on-call' interpreter when the police and hospital expect you to have a phone and car with you at all times so you can get to wherever they may need you.

I miss doing professional development that other interpreters do in centres where there are a number of them but it does make me more determined to do things myself so I can continue to improve.



JUDY:

Iqaluit (the capital of Nunavut) is where I spent the majority of my 12 days while trying to fly into Arctic Bay. I went from +10°C weather in Ontario, Canada to -36°C in Nunavut, Canada. I lugged 14 pieces of luggage (675 pounds worth) 18 times to and from the airport. During those 12 days, I stayed in hotels at very high "Arctic" prices. Taxis and hotel shuttle buses were not able to accommodate me given their operating hours and my excess luggage. I was thankful for a friendly local couple that offered to transport me, and my luggage to and from the airport the last 13 times. Their timing was perfect! Finally, the 5th attempt at landing the plane onto the snow packed gravel runway proved successful. Ice crystals, snowstorms, whiteouts and high winds didn't stop us this time. We made it! Since I was arriving in November, during the "dark season" period of 24-hour days of darkness without sunlight, I get to my new home not sure what the community even looks like in the light, but sense that everything will work out.

Living in the Arctic is definitely isolating! The "dark season" does not help. With that being said, it is not as isolating as I initially thought it would be. Then again maybe the 24 hours of "daylight" we eventually get—helps. I am in a fly-in only community. There are 2 stores from which we can buy supplies at outrageously high prices. We have "sealift" which arrives once a year with supplies for the community. The "sealift" arrives on barges with pre-ordered supplies, fuel, and so forth. We have regular flights you can bring in supplies if need be but is far more costly. People here no longer live in Igloos, yet housing is over-crowded and very limited. We have hydro produced from fuel-operated generators. We have television, telephones, and broadband Internet provided through satellite serv-

ices. Permafrost does not allow for underground piping. Our water comes from a lake and is delivered by truck to holding tanks under the houses. Sewage is pumped out of holding tanks, into trucks, and disposed of. Dog teams are not uncommon yet ski-doo's make travelling that much faster. There is no main industry here. Many households are subsistence homesteads. Hunting, sewing, and gathering are necessary parts of maintaining Inuit culture. The community consists of 95% Inuit people, with their first language being Inuktitut. Inuktitut can be written in Syllabics or Roman Orthography. The language of instruction in the school setting is Inuktitut until the seventh grade, when English is offered. In 2006, a focus group met to develop Inuit Sign Language and will be undertaking this task. Until then, ASL was agreed to be the way to go. From this, my job as an ASL-ENG Interpreter here came into being.



The school environment is much the same as other Canadian schools. The same challenges that present themselves in any one-on-one on-going interpreting setting are present here as well. Yes, I am the only interpreter. I am not Inuit; I am a white-person. There is only one deaf Inuit student. A real challenge, for me as an ASL-ENG interpreter, is the language primarily used is Inuktitut. I do not speak Inuktitut, therefore, am excluded from various events and opportunities, which in turn, excludes the student from access as well. During such times an effort is made to provide an Inuktitut interpreter to interpret into English, yet logistics don't always allow for this.

As a minority group in Canada, Inuit people are adept at using interpreters and therefore my role and job as interpreter is easily understood and accepted. I am not privy to Inuit Culture and barriers are again present for the student. A few things you quickly learn when working in the Arctic are: school trips "out on the land" require a trained person with a gun in the event of an encounter with polar bears; recess (a 10 minute outdoor break) happens whether in the "dark season" or during -40°C or colder temperatures; school closures are not limited to weather but include water shortages, sewage problems, and polar bear sightings.

As a fly-in only community, professional development and networking opportunities are not possible in person. The Internet can provide some exposure to colleagues and our profession, though it is not the ideal situation. The resources are not available for preventing and/or alleviating the effects of repetitive strain injuries (RSI). For example there are no teaming opportunities, no services such as massage, reflexology, or acupuncture. We have a Health Centre with exceptional nurses and doctors are flown in a few times a year. "Medivacs" (medical evacuations requiring a flight to the nearest hospital, 3.5 hours away) are used for emergencies.

As a hearing interpreter, I do not want to be a language model, yet in the k-12 educational setting we are often just that. This is no exception. I am the only person in the school who can fully communicate in ASL with the student. This is not the ideal situation. Therefore, I do what I can to provide the student exposure to Deaf children and adults. We are fortunate to have two deaf adults in our community that can communicate with the student. With advances in technology I have been able to set up Internet and video communication with Deaf peers. As well, being an isolated community, we have access to "tele-health video-conferencing equipment" which provides live opportunities to communicate with other deaf students in the territory of Nunavut. It is also possible to travel for extra-curricular activities. Since I have arrived, the student has been given the opportunity to travel as well. Two tournaments provided the student the chance to meet with another deaf person. Also, a two-week camp provided exposure to a small group of deaf children during the summer months in another province of Canada. These opportunities have opened a new world to the student as meeting deaf peers has provided the student with confidence and the desire to communicate.

In the end, it does not matter where in the world you live—there are good and bad experiences to be had by all. You have to make the best of the situation you are in. That is what we are doing here in the Arctic. I focus on setting the right precedent for our interpreting profession and providing the student with the best possible experience given the resources we have.

Would I change my experience here if I had the chance? Absolutely not! I have learned many invaluable things from the Inuit people of this community. As I am the first professional interpreter to be

hired in the Baffin Region of Nunavut, I realise sometimes being a “new” interpreter works for you and not against you. Professionally I had never wanted to be in an isolated position, nor in the educational setting, as I had heard so often that it was not the place for a “new” interpreter. I still believe this to be true but now that, if you do not take a chance, you will never see what a difference you can make!

Happy to share my experience with you all, “Judy of the North.”



NEXT EDITION

In the next edition we will turn our focus to what is happening in the Asia Pacific Region and in particular to a report written by Lisa Clews. Lisa has kindly given WASLI permission to share her report.

The WASLI Executive Board

secretary@wasli.org

WASLI BOARD

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