**Ablequest – Interview with Dr. Naomi Malone – December 3, 2019**

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| **Introduction** | Today, December 3, is International Day of People with Disability. The aim is to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities.A fundamental Human Right is education. Dr. Naomi Malone is a person who knows how difficult this can be for a person who was born profoundly deaf. She spoke to Barbara Sullivan here in our studio about her own education. A radio interview is not easy for someone who is deaf and lip-reads! |
| **Naomi** | I had a wonderful time at primary school. I have very fond memories of having lots of fun times during recess and lunchtime in the playground with all my lovely friends as well as having a really good time in the classroom.I also developed a love of books from visiting the library on campus at primary school though in primary school and high school I had a special teacher come and visit me and they would visit me one, two or three times a week. The teacher would go over the information I might have missed out on aurally or orally in the classroom and that was vry, very helpful.I also had teachers who were very understanding of my communication needs and not be looking at the blackboard. Yes we had blackboards in those days. I tended to sit down at the front of the classroom so that I could lip-read what the teachers were saying to me. |
| **Interviewer** | The other children, they all had good hearing? |
| **Naomi** | Yes they did all have good hearing and also in high school, they agreed that I could copy their notes in the classroom which was a terrific help, it was vey kind of them. |
| **Interviewer** | Did you learn to lip-read at primary school? |
| **Naomi** | I learned to lip-read, I think it just came out of me to lip-read when I was a baby. My parents found out I was deaf when I was about eight and a half months old but they had an idea about two months earlier.We went to the National Acoustic Laboratory as it was called then. Now it is called Hearing Australia and that was when I found out. Then about two months later I went to the Shepherd Centre and I received a pair of hearing aids and that was when they decided to give me spoken language. In other words the English language. |
| **Interviewer** | Which would then allow you to be an easy part of society. |
| **Naomi** | Yes |
| **Interviewer** | And signing came later? |
| **Naomi** | I didn’t learn sign language until I was in my 30’s. The name of sign language in Australia is Auslan and so I did learn Auslan but I have to say I think in English because I was brought up to use English, so English happened to be my first language. |
| **Interviewer** | So that is the terminology? You call it another language? You say I am fluent in English and Auslan? |
| **Naomi** | Yes, I am fluent in English but I have limited fluency in Auslan. Though I can do the actions of Auslan sign language I find it difficult to read people who are signing to me so I need Auslan interpreted to help me understand people signing to me. |
| **Interviewer** | So after high school you went on to the University of Sydney for your Arts and Law degrees and then after that to UTS to do a Masters in Public History and then onto your Phd. That must have been extraordinarily difficult? |
| **Naomi** | I found the study of all the degrees relatively fun because it involved a lot of solitary research. A lot of reading of books, journals and articles and it also involved a lot of critical analysis of what I was reading, picking up and identifying and analysing issues.I would also talk with people on a one-to-one basis, ask them what they think, what are their thoughts about what I am learning.The part that I found challenging about my study was the tutorial. During tutorials that were on every week, it would be a group, interactive discussion amongst a lot of people and I just couldn’t lip-read everyone at the same time. Back then, when I was doing my Arts-Law degree, the combined degree, there was no live captioning available, so that was quite hard.But for the final three years at Law School at the University of Sydney, the university gave me a note-taker and a lap top and I would sit next to the note-taker and the note-taker would type what the lecturer was saying and then I would lean over and read what the note-taker was typing on the lap top. It made an enormous difference. It gave me access to a fantastic legal education and I could understand what the lecturer was saying and not only that I had notes on my computer straight away. That was terrific. |
| **Interviewer** | That’s good and do they still have note-takers for deaf students? |
| **Naomi** | Yes, they do and when I was at UTS, I started my Phd. In 2013 and they had the history seminars on a monthly basis and I really wanted to go to them because I just love learning from people and what their opinions are, their thoughts and ideas and commentary. So UTS, the University of Technology Sydney that is, gave me a stenographer and the stenographer had a stenography machine like what you see in the courts or in the Houses of Parliaments of Australia, a tiny little machine. I absolutely loved it, I could just follow what everyone was saying and stay in the conversation. |
| **Interviewer** | I understand you have an absolute love of history which brings us to your book. Was it your own educational exp[erience which prompted your thesis and ultimately your book? |
| **Naomi** | Not really. I was really curious to hear the stories of other people with deafness or hearing loss, about their educational experiences and how did they successfully access their education.So I stated in my thesis that people and hearing impaired people, that the fragmenting social movement contributed to challenges and issues that students with hearing loss have. |
| **Interviewer** | Explain what you mean by fragmenting. |
| **Naomi** | A particular opinion about how students with hearing loss learn, whether it be through oralism meaning the spoken language of English or through manualism, meaning through the sign language of Auslan or whether you can learn in the bilingual mode, you be both Auslan and English, with Auslan the primary mode of language. A particular opinion about how deaf , hearing impaired children should learn. |
| **Interviewer** | Yes, what you described about your own experience is that you learnt through oralism and came to Auslan later. |
| **Naomi** | Yes, later in life |
| **Interviewer** | So do you feel bilingual is best? |
| **Naomi** | I think it depends on the child. How do you find the aptitude of that child when the child is born? How do you know the child will have an aptitude with the spoken language or an aptitude with sign language or an aptitude for both?It is really hard. It must be a very difficult decision for the parents particularly as the reality is that about 90% of deaf children are born to parents who hear and therefore use the spoken language. |
| **Interviewer** | What was that percentage? |
| **Naomi** | 90%. Nowadays with the Cochlear implant and hearing aids, live captioning on TV, in the cinema and in the classroom, it is easier to receive English as the spoken language. |
| **Interviewer** | So most of the assistive technology that is developed is around assisting the development of spoken English? |
| **Naomi** | Yes. |
| **Interviewer** | The various stages in deaf education since the 50’s is a vast subject, I know and in fact you have got it divided into whole chapters in the book. Perhaps you could give us a brief synopsis of those different stages. |
| **Naomi** | So, my book examines a history of deaf education since World War 2 and since the 1950’s deaf education has made tremendous progress. However, issues remain from the early stages of education to high school and I trace the roots of these issues and argue they exist due to the historical recommendations around oralism and manualism.In the 1960’s oralism was prevalent and in the 1970’s there was an integration of deaf and hearing-impaired students into regular schools. Arguably that formed the basis for inclusive education which is an issue currently being examined by the Disability Royal Commission. |
| **Interviewer** | Was that true of children with other disabilities at that time or just those that were deaf? |
| **Naomi** | Yes I believe it was true for other children with other disabilities at the time the 1970’s integration came into being and was on the march throughout the 70’s and I think that came about because the Whitlam Government was elected. |
| **Interviewer** | Yes, early 70’s. |
| **Naomi** | Early 1970’3 and then in the 1980’s there was a growing awareness of Auslan and then around that time the Cochlear implant arrives. A medical device that enables the sensation of sound which further encourages mainstream throughout the 1990’s, 2000’s 2010’s. And not only that, further , hearing aids became digital and continued to be improved.My historical thesis, complimented by my old history interviews with people with hearing loss about their educational experiences and going forward, like I mentioned earlier, deaf people might be consulted with about their educational experience as well as form a united movement to further improve deaf education regardless of language or communication approach. |
| **Interviewer** | You’ve talked about disability inclusion and you are a very passionate advocate of disability inclusion. There are many organisations that have the benefits of your skills and experience and knowledge regarding access and inclusion. Do you think progress is being made in public institutions. Talk a little about that. |
| **Naomi** | The overall thing that is new and being introduced into public places and progress is happening slowly but surely is due to the advocacy of the disability inclusion panels and committees at various places like the City of Sydney, where I was from 2013 to 2017 and now the State Library of NSW, the Australian Museum, the Hyde Park Memorial, the Anzac Memorial Centenary Project and also now the Sydney Festival which I joined in August this year. |
| **Interviewer** | And most of these institutions have a manager for access and inclusion don’t they, on the staff? |
| **Naomi** | Yes, they do. I am on the panel and the panel reports to the councils. Also, in NSW there is legislation, introduces in 2014 called the Disability Inclusion Act 2014. Because of that , local governments and state agencies, state bodies, corporate entities owned by the NSW State Government, have to develop disability inclusion action plans and these disability inclusion action plans are designed to help make these organisations more accessible and inclusive towards people with disabilities.I think it is really important to involve people with disabilities in the designing of systems, programs, processes because only through people with lived experiences of disability that all of us, even people without disability, can learn and gain valuable insight into the access solutions that people with disabilities use to access festivals, cinemas, TV, public places, museums, galleries and so on. |
| **Interviewer** | And the reality is that as we age we’ll all be deaf or hard of hearing. |
| **Naomi** | I agree with you. At the moment one in six Australians have some form of hearing loss. |
| **Interviewer** | One in six? |
| **Naomi** | And that is projected to increase to one in four by 2050. |
| **Interviewer** | Is that because of the population aging? |
| **Naomi** | The population aging, noise, hearing loss in the workplace and hearing loss caused by listening to music through headphones which is a particular concern for children and young people. |
| **Interviewer** | Thank you Naomi. I have been speaking with Dr. Naomi Malone, Historian, disability advocate and author of “A Constant Struggle: Deaf Education in NSW Since World War II. |