

Interviewee: Jamie Lard
Interviewers: Marissa Steppacher and Lauren Donovan
College of the Holy Cross
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Abstract: Jaimi Lard was born deafblind in 1964. She was born deaf and blind because her mother was stricken with Rubella, German measles, when she was pregnant with Jaimi. Jaimi has two brothers, but she is the only person in her family who is deaf and blind. When she was three years old, Jaimi attended a Deaf school in New York but soon moved to Perkins School for the Blind from age five. She remained at Perkins until her graduation at the age of twenty-two. It was here, at Perkins School for the Blind, where she learned how to communicate and truly flourished as an individual. Jaimi was taught through many different methods of communication including tadoma, oralism, written English, Braille, and finally, tactile American Sign Language. Jaimi currently lives in Watertown, MA with another deafblind individual and works at Perkins School for the Blind as their spokesperson. She travels to many schools and a variety of other places sharing in her experience with Perkins and her accomplishments as a Deafblind woman in today's society.

- LD** Hi, my name is Lauren Donovan. I'm hearing. I'm from Massachusetts. I go to college in Worcester at Holy Cross. My major is Psychology.
- MS** Hi, my name is Marissa Steppacher and this is my sign name. I'm from Pennsylvania and I'm hearing. I go to the same school as Lauren in Worcester, Holy Cross. My majors are Philosophy and Psychology with a concentration in ASL Deaf Studies Today we are going to be interviewing a woman for the Worcester Women History Project. Worcester Women History Project is a project that allows women from Worcester and its surrounding areas to share in their connections with the Worcester community through their stories and experiences.
- LD** I'm going to start the interview, then Marissa is going to come and finish.
- LD** Hi, my name is Lauren Donovan. What is your name?
- JL** Hello, my name is Jamie Lard.
- LD** Where were you born?
- JL** I was born in Patchogue, NY. It's near Long Island.
- LD** When were you born?
- JL** I was born in 1964.
- LD** Where you born deaf and blind?
- JL** Yes, I was born deaf and blind. My mom when she was pregnant with me, she had Rebellious Syndrome.
- LD** Oh I see. Where did you grow up and who did you live with?

JL From the time I was 5 until 21, I grew up here at Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown.

LD Do you have any brothers or sisters?

JL I have one real brother and his name is Corey and one half brother and his name is Derek.

LD Are they deaf or blind?

JL Nope, both of my brothers are hearing and they have their sight.

LD Oh I see. How did you communicate with your family?

JL I used finger spelling most of the time. They can sign some, but that's how I communicated with my family.

LD Where did you live at elementary, middle and high school?

JL When I was one and half, I went to a deaf school name Cleary and that is in New York. That is where I went before I came here to Perkins.

LD Do you remember any problems or frustrations with school?

JL Throughout my experience I remember being really frustrated with speech. I continually and constantly struggle with speech; it was so hard for me because I didn't understand it.

LD You ever feel alone or isolated?

JL When I'm with my family I feel more isolated, but at school I love being at school with my friends, interacting with them, it's definitely more fun and interesting with my friends.

LD Thank You. Ok, now the interviewer is going to change and Marissa is going to come finish the interview.

LD Thank you.

JL Awesome. Thank you.

MS Now it's Marissa. Now you and Lauren just finished talking about your schooling here at Perkins and you attended Perkins from ages 5 to 21, right?

JL Yup.

MS So, what are doing you do with your education now?

JL My education was just wonderful. All of my teachers could sign, they signed to me and to us. Most of the time our class of education was one on one and sometimes it would be in really small groups. In school I learned Math, Science, Reading, Social Studies, History, and we would use large print textbooks that we would read from because it would take more time to explain things to us as students, but it just a different way, it was different than mainstream kids are taught. Being deaf and blind, it just takes more time, it's a more intense education.

MS Wow! So, do you ever share these kinds of experiences and stories with anyone else? I mean, do you visit or travel?

JL Oh yes, definitely. I have visited a lot of places. I go and give lectures; I've been to elementary schools, high schools, universities, and Lions Clubs. I go and talk about my life and my story, the experiences I had, to all different types of groups. When groups come here for tours, at Perkins, I share my stories with the tour groups as well and that is what I'm doing here today to all of you. I love my work.

MS And you been to Worcester to present at Holy Cross, is that right?

JL Yes, I came a few months ago, me and my interpreter, we came to visit. We met with

- about 200 students, I gave a lecture about my story and it definitely impacted the students hearing what it was like to be deaf blind and growing up deaf blind.
- MS** Now, did you feel any connection in Holy Cross community, meeting teachers or students or do you feel it was more of a connection to the Worcester community itself?
- JL** I think all three. I feel a connection to all three.
- MS** Right, but could you expand on that more, specifically the connection?
- JL** Well, my family lives near Worcester and I remember growing up, that my family would go to the mall nearby in Worcester and they had deaf blind connections there. The deaf blind contact center and we would go and I would meet up with friends, deaf blind friends from Worcester. We would go to museums and we would meet other deaf blind groups in Worcester and together we became more of a group, more involved and we supported each other because we were all deaf blind groups from Worcester.
- MS** Wow, that's really nice. Now, I noticed as we have been talking, we are creating a theme -- it's your independence, what do you think has enabled you to become so independent?
- JL** Well, for me becoming independent was very exciting. At the Perkins school, the teachers taught me how to become more independent. I've learned how to take care of myself. Throughout my life, my friends have always shared their stories and experiences and it really influenced me and impacted me and it made me really eager to learn to become independent. I've also had apartment practice for independent living. I learned how to cook and clean and take care of myself. I learned how to go to the bank and the store and how to budget my money. The staff at Perkins also helped me to find an apartment in Watertown. I share that apartment with a deaf blind roommate. So, that's really how I became independent. I don't have to live with my family, thankfully. I love that. Being independent allows me to be more involved and in touch with the outside community and people.
- MS** So, if you're cooking, what's your favorite food to cook?
- JL** Well, I love to cook with my friends; it's a lot safer and a lot more fun than by myself. If I'm cooking by myself, I get very nervous something can happen that I can miss, a pot could boil over, or a fire could start, so it just makes me nervous. If I'm cooking by myself, I use frozen foods, something that I can just put in the microwave, but when I'm with my friends we have a lot of fun. We make chicken, vegetables, cookies, brownies, all sorts of things. I love being able to chat with my friends while we cook, it's a lot of fun.
- MS** So, would you rather live by yourself or alone, which?
- JL** I enjoy living with my roommate it's a lot less boring and a lot less lonely.
- MS** But it's nice to have someone to communicate with, right?
- JL** Definitely. My roommate is also deaf blind and so we feel very comfortable communicating with each other. We grew up together and went through the Perkins school together, so we are very comfortable communicating with each other.
- MS** So, I'm sure in giving all your presentations, you've noticed that a lot of people look

- up to you, why do you think that is?
- JL** A lot of people love to watch me and see me signing and I'm very proud of myself. I love being able to influence them and show them that deaf blind can do things. A lot of people have this idea that people who are deaf and blind can't do many things and they're just potatoes, but we're not. So, I like to be able to show them we can do different things.
- MS** One more question, what do you want people to remember you for?
- JL** Again.
- MS** Like, if you could give one piece of advice that people could remember you for, what would you want that to be?
- JL** Can you give me an example?
- MS** Would you want to tell people to believe in themselves or that they can do it? A positive example. If you could have one thing that people could remember you by, what do you want that to be?
- JL** Do you mean for kids or adults?
- MS** Yes, Yes, for kids.
- JL** Okay. Well, I just remember, before kids would watch and they would watch me zipper up my jacket and the kids would just look at me and be amazed that I could do it by myself and so now, they all know that deaf blind people can do things independently and that's what I want to do.
- MS** And what about parents?
- JL** The parents always feel really proud of me that I have been able to become so independent. Before, when I was a baby, the doctor had told my parents that I would never learn how to communicate and that I would not be able to become independent. He told my parents that I would have to stay in the hospital for my entire life. That would have been awful and for my parents who were really happy, they would bring teachers to my home and they taught me how to get up and walk around and also learn how to communicate and sign different things, like cookie and bathroom. So, parents are always really excited that I have been able to learn how to do so many things.
- MS** That's wonderful. We appreciate this interview so much. Just want to thank you so much for your time today and for helping us learn a little bit more about you.
- JL** You're welcome.
- MS** Jamie and I are back again. There is one more question I wanted to ask her, it's been something that been interesting me this entire interview and its how'd you learn finger spelling and sign just tactilely?
- JL** I started learning how to sign when I was a year and half old and as you get older contact signing becomes a lot more natural. A lot of people are always really surprised because when I sign with you I sign very lightly. When I place my hands on yours, it's very light. A lot of deaf blind people press down so hard so, now you have learned through me that my contact signing is very light and it's natural and normal and there is really nothing to it.
- MS** I'm just amazed by it. To watch you sign and know you can understand what I'm saying.

JL Excellent. Please feel free to ask me any more questions. I love helping new people learn more about the way I communicate and my signing. Thank you.

MS How did you start?

JL Well, I was one and half years old.

MS Where you signing or orally, what did they teach you with first?

JL They taught both. Signing and oral lip reading at the same time.

MS How did you do oralism?

JL It was frustrating and hard for me, I always struggled with it. I have been very fortunate because of all my teachers have known how to sign throughout my time at school. So, I spent my time signing and you know I was very fortunate.

MS That's great. Thank you for coming back so much. We really appreciate it. Now we're done.

JL You're welcome. Thank you.