

## **Transcript of Ruth Silver's Legacy Celebration**

>> Father Bill: Our master of ceremonies will be, of course, our Executive Director Joan Schneider.

[ Applause ]

>> Joan: Thank you, as we get the microphone switched as well as the listening device. Thank you, everyone, for coming. As you know, Ruth has been the founder of this agency. It's been fun hearing people talk about Ruth and what she meant and how she impacted their lives. A very special woman.

The CART services are available via the website. If you utilize CART services, there is the website on your personal phone as well as on the wall there.

All the listening devices are working, I take it. Eileen is having a problem here.

>>: This one is not working.

>> Joan: I got a blinking red light on my system now.

>>: Batteries.

>> Joan: I think we might need batteries here.

Hold on a minute. We were testing the batteries this morning, and we must have missed an actual transmitter. Lucky us.

I will shut the transmitter off so you will have this feedback.

I now have a green light.

>>: Let there be hearing.

>>: Let there be light.

[ Laughter ]

>>: I couldn't resist.

>> Joan: Sorry for that technicality. We think we got the ears and eyes taken care of with the visual and we have sign language interpreters. Let's get the program rolling.

I would like to introduce our first speaker, Juliette Welch. I don't know how long she knew Ruth. When I asked her if she would speak, she said, I will try to keep it under an hour.

[ Laughter ]

Okay. When I start talking about Ruth, I got stories. So, I am going to hand the microphone over to her.

>> Juliette: Good afternoon.

>> Joan: Do you want me to hold the mike for you?

>> Juliette: No. Thank you all for coming.

I walk in the footsteps of a 5 feet 100-pound giant. She was hard to keep up with.

I met Ruth years and years ago, at the Center for Blind Children. She was the executive director and I was a volunteer. We have been friends ever since.

About a year after she resigned from that position, she called me and she said she had been in mourning because after the doctor told her her hearing loss was progressive, she just lost it. She had to mourn and recover. And she did. She was a strong little person.

So she called me and said, you know, I met a few other deafblind people and they don't have any place to go or things to do, so I would like to start a social group. Would you help me? Yes. I didn't know how or where, but we started a social group.

It wasn't long afterwards she said, you know what, these

people can't communicate. They don't talk to each other. The sighted people don't know how to talk to the deafblind and vice versa. We have got to do something. Will you help me start a center? Sure.

So, we did. Ruth hired some very good teachers. We got a board directors together that was just great. Several members are here today, Harvey and Bill and Father Bill, of course. Father Bill was one of my most grateful accidental meetings. I met him in the sacristy at St. Claire in North Lake. He signed a mass and my heart almost leaped out of my chest. I ran out and said, Father Bill, do you know Ruth Silver? I heard of her.

She wants to start a center for deafblind people. We need a Board of Directors and we need some help.

Okay. That was it and Father bill was on our side. So, we started.

Father bill was always able to find us housing, first the St. John's School for the Deaf. When that closed, a room at St. Mary's Academy. Ruth took the cafeteria and designed a center for rehabilitation of deafblind people. It all worked out. I don't know, I have notes here, but I don't know what all else to tell you right now, except that Ruth Silver was a life-long friend and she could take problems and turn them around in your head and come up with solutions. Everyone loved her. Thank you for listening.

[ Applause ]

>> Joan: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Our next speaker is Heidi Kearny. I will have Heidi have her tell us her story. Heidi, I know you are excited to tell us. You have to wait until we have the interpreters set up with the microphones and everything else. Give us one minute.

She said, now can I start? Now?

No. You have to wait.

[ Light Laughter ]

>>: Hello, everyone. My name is Heidi. I am from Rhinelander, three-hour drive from Milwaukee. I am here to say a little bit about myself.

I went to the eye doctor in early 2000 and they found out I had a progressive vision loss. I was very sad when I heard that news. I sat a long time and just thought about it and tried to figure out what I was going to do, where was I going to get more information about deafblind individuals.

I didn't give up hope. I went on the computer and started doing research. I called for different information and started searching where in the State of Wisconsin I could get services as a deafblind person. As I continued my search, I first found the Wisconsin Council for the Blind.

I called them and started asking them questions about where I

could get services in the state. They happened to know -- they referred me to the Center for Deaf-Blind Persons. I was very excited to receive that contact information.

I excitedly made my connection with the Center for Deaf-Blind Persons shortly thereafter. They really focused on communication. Of course, it's considered old fashion now, but I learned how to use a TTY, which often is used by teletyping in order to communicate.

I started using that to communicate with different people. But then I started running into other problems. People were often asking me to repeat themselves.

Then I called and I realized that I was speaking to someone who was blind. Ruth was actually the person I was speaking with. We really finally realized that we were communicating with each other and I was communicating with a blind person. That's when I first met Ruth Silver, and she was a hard of hearing and blind person. I thought, how are we possibly going to communicate?

Ruth said, we will be able to use telebraille communication.

I never heard of it, but I was very excited that we were able to communicate, and we worked our way through it.

That was how we communicated with each other.

I came down to Milwaukee and actually met Ruth in person and was so excited to see who this person was that I was working with.

I asked her, "How are you communicating with me?" when I saw her in person. She brought the telebraille technology out so I could see it, which was an amazing technology which I had never seen before, and she helped me remain positive and lifted my spirits and helped me communicate.

That day Ruth gave me a tour of the center. It was an amazing thing and all the positive things that Ruth did for me. She encouraged me so much. She was an incredibly sweet and smart person. That's all I have. Thank you.

[ Applause ]

>> Joan: Thank you, Heidi.

Heidi mentioned the telebraille, what she encountered with Ruth when she talked to Ruth on the phone, where Heidi had to slow down her typing because she was typing too fast and Ruth asked her to repeat.

When a hearing person would call Ruth, she would ask questions and we would hear this: (telebraille machine).

And what she was doing, that is the Perkins Brailier. Ruth was taking her notes, the phone number, the name, and what other piece of information she thought was important so she would remember. She had a memory. She knew phone numbers and names and kids and grandkids and just amazing in that way.

Our next presenter, and she is already smiling, I see. Hi, Lynn, it's Joan. Are you ready to do your presentation?

>> Lynn: I don't know.

>> Joan: Sure, you are. I will give you the mike. I will put this on you, okay?

>> Lynn: All right. Good afternoon, everybody.

I have known Ruth a long time. I was also at the Center for Deafblind Children when she worked there. I have known Juliette a long time, too.

I can remember things that she taught me. I remembered she taught me prints on palm and I also learned about TTY and I also -- she also had print topics in support group. We learned about different gadgets in the kitchen. She will be remembered by all.

I have nothing else.



>> Joan: Nothing else to say? Well, did you want to look at your braille notes?

>> Lynn: Yeah.

>> Joan: I was surprised when you started talking without them.

>> Lynn: Someone will have to hold the mike. I have it upside down. I have known Ruth a long time. She was more than a friend. Ruth was also a teacher and a leader in support group for a while. She was working at the Center for the deafblind Children. I didn't know she was coming here. I thought she was going to work with kids. I was surprised she was going to work here.

I was at the Center for Deafblind Children when Ruth worked there. She helped me to get a pen pal.

Ruth was deafblind herself. I don't know if there are other deafblind teachers other than Ruth. She is the only one I ever had. Some examples include prints on palm, TTY support group, and showing gadgets in the kitchen.

We would have different topics in support group.

One time we practiced guiding people, a person, to a chair and

upstairs.

I remember she came to the Christmas party.

I think she enjoyed WISH events, especially the picnic.

She told me she would dance my way if I got married.

She always said it wasn't a party without me there.

>>: How sweet.

>> Lynn: She got me involved in Easter Seals.

I didn't know about Easter Seals until Ruth told me about it. I decided to try it out the first year. She contacted the Easter Seals staff and they came here to talk to me.

I played games in the afternoon.

Later, I took ceramics.

I thank Ruth for the support she gave me while I registered for membership.

I feel happy when Ruth is around. I was sad to hear that she was sick. I was also sad when she died.

She will be remembered by all.

[ Applause ]

>> Joan: Did you want to say something more?

>> Lynn: I would like to sing a song now.

I went to camp last week, and I was in a show, and I would like to sing that song for you all now.

Thank you.

(Singing to the tune of 12 Days of Christmas)

On the first day of Lions Camp my counselors gave to me:

One hot and fun summer sunny day.

On the second day of Lions Camp my counselors gave to me:

Two campfires.

One hot and fun summer sunny day.

On the third day of Lions Camp my counselors gave to me:

Three meals a day.

Two campfires.

One hot and fun summer sunny day.

On the fourth day of Lions Camp my counselors gave to me:

Four new friends.

Three meals a day.

Two campfires.

One hot and fun summer sunny day.

On the fifth day of Lions Camp, my counselors gave to me:

Five golden marshmallows.

[ Laughter ]

Four new friends.

Three meals a day.

Two campfires.

One hot and fun summer sunny day.

On the sixth day of Lions Camp they gave to me:

Six rainy days.

[ Laughter ]

Five golden marshmallows.

Four new friends.

Three meals a day.

Two campfires.

One hot and fun summer sunny day.

On the seventh day of Lions Camp my counselors gave to me:

Seven nights on a hard rock bed.

[ Laughter ]

Six rainy days.

Five golden marshmallows.

Four new friends.

Three meals a day.

Two campfires.

One hot and fun summer sunny day.

Thank you.

[ Cheers and Applause ]

>> Joan: Well, this is Joan. I guess Ruth was right about you being a big party woman. You have everyone laughing here.

I don't know, is she going to go back to camp next year? We will have to see.

>>: I don't think so.

>> Joan: Last, but not least, board members that have been here since the inception of the center, we still have a few board members that have been members of the board for many years. Father Bill has been here since the inception and still on the board. I would like to introduce Father Bill Key.

[ Applause ]

>> Father Bill: It's a hard song to follow.

I would like to take a moment to thank the board members that are here. If you are a board member or past board member please stand or wave so we can acknowledge you.

[ Applause ]

Thank you. It doesn't happen all alone. It happens with a group of people.

This is Helen Keller deafblind week. There are deafblind people around and a good enough number to be doing something about it. In many ways we recognize that. One of the things that we did very early as a board we were affiliated with the Helen Keller National Center in New York. That meant we could put their name on our letterhead, and it gave us a connection. They have a big center in New York if you want to stay there and be part of that, but they don't have other places for service. They might have some state coordinators for deafblind, but the Center for Deaf-Blind Persons in Milwaukee is unique that we are training people right here. That is very unique. Some others are purchasing services through other areas and the frustration to find those services is difficult, but some of that we have mastered here. And they are sending people to learn from us. Imagine that.

We are doing it without the residency thing, and that is important as well.

We have board meetings. They were at the Red Cross center on 26<sup>th</sup> and Wisconsin. I recall one meeting particularly, depending on hearing aids, that the water bubbler refrigerator started and that white noise over everything and you couldn't hear a thing because it blocks out your hearing aids and you can't meet.

We learned on the way what we can do and can't do or what is going to stop us.

The hearing problems people have are very gradual in developing. Ruth talked about those a little bit in the end of her book, but saying I am beginning to face a new thing. It's not like all of a sudden I can't hear anything. It's a gradual process.

Visual problems are the same way. Generally they decrease with what you have available. You don't know tomorrow when you wake up if it's going to be worse or back or what. One of those things that is not clear in deafblind is that it's always a changing environment. I can get around today, but I can't get around tomorrow. I can hear it today and tomorrow it is not easy. It's constantly adapting. Ruth was able to do that. She was also able to encourage those along



the way that were adapting and finding it difficult to do.

What I find amazing is she learned how to do a computer as well. She had a setup that she could go online and Google on a braille printout display. Take a look at it. She could work her way through that stuff along the way.

Five or six years ago she wrote a book. How many of you have done that?

What are we waiting for?

In the process along the way, Ruth, who was blind first, and as her hearing declined, she needed to learn sign language. For a blind person, sign language is very difficult. Expressively I can say this sign moves this direction across, but you have to do it with hands-on, feeling it.

When I make that sign, if it's coming toward me or I have to go the other way, and that kind of visual perception. To learn it, it didn't happen overnight. It doesn't happen overnight for any of us learning those sign language communication skills, but she was able to do it along the way. So much so that Heidi here spoke to her on a video television, the video phone for the deaf. She said, wow, there is a lady in Milwaukee that is blind and knows sign language. Isn't that amazing? It is.

We can salute that kind of thing and recognize it along the

way.

I never thought my hands were big. Ruth did. She would be grabbing me with both hands and reading the whole hand.

When I was signing to her sometimes, because I was a public signer in church and had a lot of room and energy, and Ruth is five foot, we heard, and she is going, where is that sign going? Can you bring that down a little bit to something I can manage?

We did that along the way, too.

When they were ready to open the deafblind center with ideas and a teacher, we didn't have a place. I was working at the St. John's Center for the Deaf and said, I can get you a place, a couple of rooms here.

All right. It will take us a while to get there.

I think you should start the first Thursday of the year in January. She blamed me for kicking the door open and we have moved ahead since then.

That first Thursday, as all the Thursdays in January and February, it snowed. The deafblind were coming in vans and taxi and the staff sliding through the snow getting there.

We pursued and little by little it went to a couple of days to make it happen along the way.

I see Howard is here. Hi, Howard.

One day they called me and said we need an interpreter for Doris who is deafblind and she needed to learn to knit. She already knew how to crochet. She was skilled at that. Howard is a good instructor but not a signer. My job was to interpreter for that.

Well, I didn't have that in my resume yet how to knit, so I had to listen to him and translate it for him. Doris was struggling. She couldn't quite get this because she crochets like crazy. We took a break and came back. Doris picked up the needles in the other hand. Howard says, she is deafblind and left-handed. We can adjust. And she picked it up just like that.

That's the kinds of things that happen along the way, a little bit at a time, and that kind of service that was there.

I watched a clip about a deafblind man getting his information about the World Cup and actively seeing the game being played by signing along. There are so many things that we can be involved in. Ruth went regularly to the Rep Theater and listened to the plays and had it explained to her a little bit. I could talk to her about it the next day and we had a good

conversation. There is nothing we can't be involved in. That was also part of the message that is there.

Even two new people, she described the first WISH meeting when the deafblind got together were like bumps on a log. Come to the next WISH meeting and they are not bumping.

Come to a picnic? When is the picnic? July 14<sup>th</sup> at Wilson Park. Come on down. It will be fun. There will be all sorts of people there, hot dogs, brats, et cetera, because the social aspect was so important.

One of those days at St. John's we had the picnic in the back area, there was a patio, and it rained. There were puddles. There were ducks landing on the puddles. We had a great time.

Ruth was one of those, as we know, a very determined person. When we put together the last center, they found a place and it was in an old cafeteria room. The cafeteria room, the windows were about this high over my head. That meant there was a 40-foot echoy ceiling. That doesn't help hearing something clearly. You need low ceiling.

With the architect she worked it out and the windows were here and you could see out. They raised the floor.

She had the kind of -- I don't know if that was her idea, but

everything else in there she knew exactly how big the rooms were, where they were located. She helped design it. She may have had a print made so she could trace it, but she could explain where all those things were at every point visually. That got us to where we are today.

All those things along the way, Ruth had a way of recognizing the people that were there, how to get money, recognized and was grateful to the people that worked along the way. I was just one part of that group. I am happy to be there.

She was a great advocate for the Lions Club. She gave talks. Giving a talk helped us in so many ways along the way. At this point and in this place we are still serving and welcoming people at different levels, helping them move to the next level and being comfortable with themselves, recognizing the abilities there and the services possible.

Today as we celebrate Ruth Silver, her dedication to this place, and growing throughout this time, we are grateful and that's worth a little time this afternoon to say thank you.

[ Applause ]

>> Joan: Thank you. I just lost my name tag. I lost my identity, guys.

>>: We know where you live.

>>: Listen for her laugh.

>> Joan: As you came in, I don't know if you were aware of these poems here on the wall, these poster boards. It was after Ruth's passing -- she passed on a Tuesday. I think it was a Thursday I got a phone call from a woman who said Ruth had done a children's program at Betty Brinn's Museum and wrote poems. Would you like them? I have been holding on to these boards. Would you like them? I had no idea what they were. I said sure. I drove down to South Milwaukee and got these boards. This is what Ruth was. You talk about visionaries and making things tactile, she loved working with children. While she did this, she read her notes in braille and had the children put the lemons on the lemon board and apples on the apple board and was very engaging with all the practices.

Ruth loved ice cream, hot fudge. Because we couldn't have tables in here because we wanted to accommodate everyone to sit, we settled for DQ. Hopefully it's acceptable to her.

What went into today's program, was for Ruth, the office. I would like to ask the staff and the board members to come up.

I will start with the staff, I guess.

I see Dani Kaslow.

Deanne Lautenbach.

Elyse Heinrich.  
Janice Syndic.  
Lisa Crissey.

The black color is an invitation to communication. It's less eye strain if you have the blacktop on and seeing the contrast of our hands.

Janice, I don't see her. Where is she? All right.

This is the staff here at the center at this point in time. Give them applause because they did a lot for this.

[ Applause ]

I guess I would like to welcome now the board members.

President, Dr. Bill Myers.  
Board treasurer, Ed Brady.  
Father Bill Key.  
Harvey Pogoriler.  
Dr. Richard Brunkan.  
Diane Creegan.  
Diane is a newbie on the board.

Come up. We will do our dedication to Ruth. We still have some wall space. We have a blank wall as you walk in the front door. Along with this, as you entered the door and to

the right was this tree branch with these little birds with words which made you think of Ruth.

Our goal next is to make a word art out of that. That will be another wall hanging at the center.

Dr. Bill Myers, do you want to help here? This is our dedication to Ruth.

[ Applause ]

It says, Ruth Silver, founder.

I had a printout somewhere.

Thank you.

It says: Growing up in Milwaukee, Ruth Silver had dreams of becoming a symphony cellist. Those dreams came to end at 16 when she learned she was going blind.

After earning a degree from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in education of the deaf, Ruth taught deaf and deafblind children in Iowa and Massachusetts.

She returned to Milwaukee to marry and become a teacher/foster parent of a child who was deafblind and started a family.



She taught at the Center for Blind Children prior to becoming the executive director.

At the same time her once excellent hearing slowly deteriorated, leaving her both blind and hard of hearing.

Ruth noted gaps in services for individuals who are deafblind and resolved to take action.

Wanting to meet others with the hearing and vision loss, Ruth set a date, time, and meeting place for people to meet. The first meeting was in September of 1983.

This formed the social group With Impaired Sight and Hearing (WISH).

In 1985 the Center for Deaf-Blind Persons was founded as a nonprofit agency designed to provide adults who are deafblind with emotional support, and instruction in communication and daily living skills.

Training focuses on learning tactile ways of doing everyday tasks. Ruth served as executive director until 2002, and thereafter continued as director emeritus and deafblind consultant.

The center you see here today is the culmination of Ruth's unflagging drive and determination to better the lives of

individuals who are deafblind.

[ Applause ]

I wasn't going to break down.

Thank you all for coming and enjoy the remainder of the social event.

If you haven't had your ice cream bar, go have it. There is food over there, too.

Any questions, feel free to talk to a board member or staff.

Marv Silver is here. Thank you for coming, Marv.

And his daughter, Julia, is here as well. Feel free to welcome the family as well.

And John Kessleman and Flo. Thank you all for coming.

Enjoy! It's done.

[ Applause ]