

Jean Greenwood Thomas

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Jean Greenwood Thomas was born to a deaf father, Virgil Greenwood and a hearing mother Lucy McMills, child of deaf adult, abbreviated as CODA. Her father attended the Utah School for the Deaf (USD) in Ogden, Utah. He left USD in 1931 for work, which was common for USD students back then.

Through Jean's parents, she grew up in the Utah Deaf community. Jean also has several deaf relatives. She had a deaf aunt, Gloria Greenwood Barney, and a deaf uncle, Stewart Greenwood. One of her sisters, Ruth Felter, was also an interpreter. Lucy had a sister, Eva who was an interpreter, mainly for the 1st Ward in Salt Lake City.



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Valerie G. Kinney, a long time member of the Utah Association of the Deaf observed that Jean's mother Lucy had had a large influence in Jean becoming an interpreter (Valerie G. Kinney, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

Jean taught American Sign Language (ASL) classes at Ogden High School from 1989 to 1994. In the spring of 1990, the ASL classes received endorsement from the Ogden School Board of Education and from the Utah State Board of Education through the Technology Programs. This is when Jean began teaching ASL classes in Ogden High School.

While Jean taught ASL classes, her friend Annette Tull, also a CODA and interpreter, expressed interest in teaching ASL classes at Jordan High School. Annette and Jean interpreted for the USDB Institutional Council for many years. During the spring of 1993, Jean invited Cal Evans, a Jordan Special Education Director, to visit her high school class to see if they would like to include ASL classes in Jordan High School programs. In Ogden District, Winefred Ospitale worked with the Vocational Education Department of the State of Utah and successfully got the Utah State Board of Education to give the Ogden City School District ASL classes approval as fulfilling high school credit for graduation in vocational education. The goal of this program was to assist students in becoming interpreters for the deaf. After visiting Jean's class, Cal Evans got approval for Jordan High School to begin in 1994. With the help of Jean, Annette was able to get her teaching job at that high school (Jean Thomas, personal communication, October 24, 2012).

At the same time, Jean was on the 1993 State Legislature Study Group to recognize the interpreter state certification through a formal interpreter-training program and recognize ASL as a foreign language in school settings. She even pushed for the high school programs to have rules and regulations to prevent just anyone off the street from teaching ASL without the appropriate credentials (Jean Thomas, personal communication, October 24, 2012). Behind the scenes during the 1994 Utah Legislative session, she had network access to the key people from the 1993 State Legislature Study Group and played a huge role advocating Senate Bill 41 to certify interpreters and the Senate Bill 42 to give American Sign Language the same status as a foreign language. As a result, both bills were enacted.

Jean shared that the ASL classes in high schools paved the way for Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) to endorse the fully funded interpreter-training program, and also gave ASL high school classes recognition as a foreign language as well as vocational credit toward graduation. It was not until Ogden City School District did their work for sign language that SLCC became motivated to include their bid for ASL interpreting at the SLCC (Jean Thomas, personal communication, October 24, 2012). Most of the work was done with the efforts of Ogden City School District as well as pursuit by Jean.

Jean did this work with the assistance of four people in authority at the Ogden City School District: Cyrus Freston, special education director with Ogden City School District (son of deaf parents, Cyrus and Lillian Freston), Winefred Ospitale, vocational education; Larry Leatham, assistant principal at Ogden High School and Santiago Sandoval, principal at Ogden High School. None of the effort would have happened without Jean's pursuit and the support of people in authority.

As soon as the laws were passed in the spring of 1994, Jean was recruited by Dr. Lee Robinson, Superintendent of the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind and Dr. Robert G. Sanderson, a deaf representative on the USDB Institutional Council, to work as the sign language specialist. She was instrumental in assisting 36 interpreters achieve official certification (Golden Keys Award Program Book, 1999).

On October 6, 1999, Jean received a Golden Key award from the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation for her many years of service to Utah Deaf community. According to the 1999 Golden Key Awards program book, she showed outstanding leadership and dedication in the field of sign language and instruction. As a daughter of a deaf father and a CODA mother, Jean has a clear perspective of the needs of the Utah Deaf community, particularly regarding the skills necessary to communicate effectively in a hearing world. She has honed her personal skills in order to achieve maximum success in the support of others and holds the highest level of both national and state interpreting certification (Golden Keys Award Program Book, 1999).

Moreover, Jean is a pioneer in the interpreting field. She was the first to teach American Sign Language as a foreign language in high school setting. She has served on the Utah Interpreter Certification Board. She has been a leader in sponsoring legislation regarding interpreting certification and has participated on numerous committees by sharing her expertise on sign language issues, and has worked tirelessly to address the serious lack of qualified interpreters for the Utah's Utah deaf population (Golden Keys Award Program Book, 1999).

Jean is a past recipient of the Ogden Standard Examiner "Apple for the Teacher" award and recognition for "Outstanding Service in Distance Education" for the students of Utah. She served as a consultant to the Utah State Office of Education's Department of Students at Risk Services and continued her active involvement as an advocate for interpreters as well as for the rights of deaf people. In spite of her busy full-time job and volunteer activities, she was always willing to provide her own expert interpreter services whenever needed (Golden Keys Award Program Book, 1999).

As shown above, there seems to be no limit to the energy and effort that Jean demonstrates toward improving her own skills as well as encouraging others through her exceptional teaching, organizational, and motivational abilities (Golden Keys Award Program Book, 1999). Jean was involved with the initial setup of the ASL classes in high schools with the assistance of the Ogden City School District. She was one of those behind the scenes individuals, without recognition. Like her, those who work behind the scenes deserves to be recognized for the impact they have, and Jean's specific help to grow the interpreting community in the state of Utah. Jean is definitely a tower of strength to the Utah Deaf community (Golden Keys Award Program Book, 1999).

Notes

Jean Thomas, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner. October 24, 2012.

Valerie G. Kinney, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner, January 9, 2013.

Bibliography

Golden Keys Award Program Book, October 6, 1999.

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