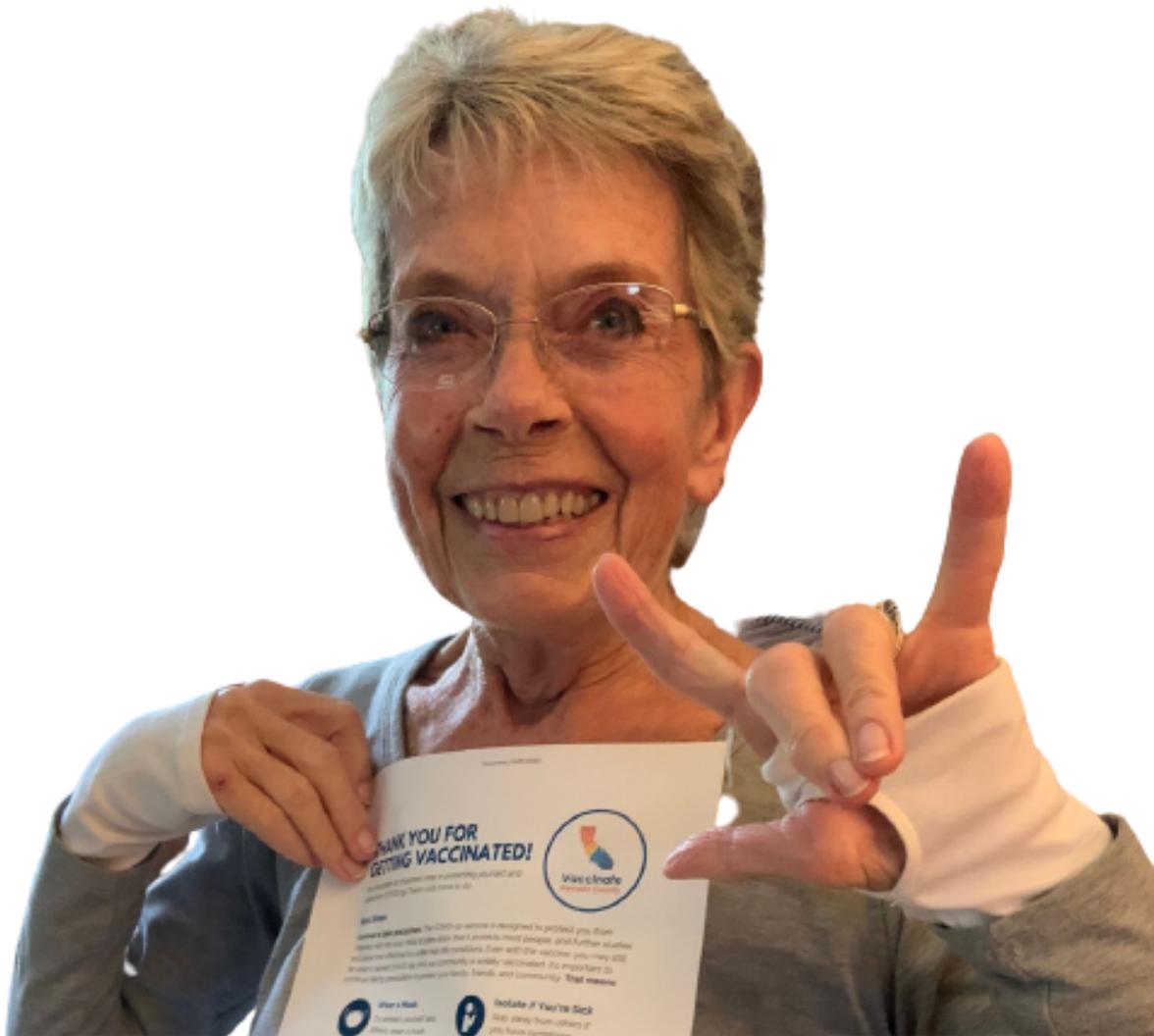


MRID GOLDEN MOMENTS

Marilyn Mitchell, MS, MMP, CSC, NIC-Professional



Marilyn Mitchell wearing glasses, a long sleeve grey shirt holding a COVID vaccination paper and flashing the "I LOVE YOU" sign.

Memories, Minnesota RID and community,

Thank you, Richard, so much for your request to share treasured memories of my years in MN, the beginnings of MRID, certification, and involvement in the Deaf community. 50 years ago, interpreters were active in both RID and NAD, including the local and state chapters. I have to share my experiences about both as they were the foundations I would build my personal and professional experiences on.

I met Deaf persons in South Dakota in 1960, who became my second family and friends, at age 18. I was dating Ron Mitchell and eventually married (1963) him deepening my relationship with his Deaf siblings and their friends. Initially Ron would tell me what his brother, Jim, and sister, Barb were signing. That was awkward for me so I asked them to teach me how to sign. The language of ASL was called sign language in those days. Having grown up in a stoic Norwegian family with minimal emotion demonstrated, I came alive with this family and how they were living and communicating - demonstrative, happy, open, honest. I immersed myself in the community - family, school for the deaf and deaf club. There were no TTYs or TV captions so Ron and I became the "interpreters" of many important situations. Ron's family didn't sign so I became the "interpreter" during family events. After three years, I was thought to be pretty fluent in sign language and was offered a teaching job at the South Dakota School for the Deaf. I had no desire to teach while working on my bachelor's degree, but I accepted this offer and immersed myself in the world of teaching for the next 40+ years, loving each and every experience that came with the profession.

Sign language wasn't permitted when teaching at the School for the Deaf, and when I was told I couldn't sign, my response was, "These students won't learn through speech and speechreading only. If you have visitors on campus, don't bring them to my class. I will only use

speech and speechreading when the class is focused on that (English and pronunciation).” That was pretty bold, but I was respected and my approach was honored.

Fast forward to 1966 and moving to Minnesota. Ron and I adopted two children and moved to MN and the MN School for the Deaf in Fairbault, where I substitute taught. We were totally accepted into the Deaf community of Fairbault. We became part of a group of Deaf couples who got together once a month and laughed and shared - Jim and Eldora Jones, Petersons, John and Paula Mathews, Jim and Kathy Potter, Boneyo’s. We were the only hearing couple and I felt so honored. Deaf people showed me how to be candid and bold. When the group came to our home, I wasn’t sure how to deal with the fact that Jim Jones was a chain smoker and loved to “talk” constantly. So, I added a string to a small hanging planter and hung in on Jim’s neck when he came in so the cigarette ashes would fall into it instead of our floor. He (and everyone else) thought it was hysterical. Thank God! I made so many mistakes in those days, but we all knew how to separate roles - friendship and work. I saw different signs in MN than in SD and I had the nerve to tell a few that they were using the wrong signs. With smiles and maybe “compassion” they described how signs were regional. Deaf people were my teachers and when I was “interpreting” or teaching, they trusted me and I totally respected them. What a gift!

In 1972, I interviewed for and was offered an interpreter/actress position in a federal program at TVI (Technical Vocational Institute) Program for Deaf Students, St. Paul. Bob Lauritsen was the program director and Dave Custer was the federal grant director. I could name my days of work and the time frame that would work for me. I took the job, memorized scripts and acted on educational films for Deaf and hard-of-hearing college students. The job was perfect for me and the team I worked with was truly a “team”. I eventually moved to St. Paul (1977) and worked full time. It was at TVI that I “met” national Deaf

professionals through conversations with Bob Lauritsen. He traveled to Washington DC a few times a year for conferences and grant meetings. When he returned, he would share introductions to various Deaf people, telling me to remember these names because eventually I would meet all of these people - Fred Schriber, Al Sonnenstral, Alan Hurwitz, Bob Davilla, etc. He was right! I met all of them.

RID had been created when I joined the organization in 1972, and MRID was established the year before. Everyone was in the learning curve. Sometimes I feel we still are in the learning curve, but on a positive note. RID, MRID, NAD, MADC are alive, changing, and growing, although sometimes painfully. When I joined, my friends suggested it was important to also join our connected organizations, NAD, MDAC, TDI and so I did. Without the Deaf community and its organizations RID would not have been created. I continue to be a member of NAD and local Affiliate chapters of RID in the state/city where I live and have always been grateful for those suggestions so many years ago. One of the most memorable experiences of the connection and collaboration between RID and NAD during RID's early years, was that the NAD conference followed the RID conference every two years, and many of us interpreters stayed to volunteer interpret during the NAD conference. I wish every member of affiliate chapters and of RID today had the numerous opportunities I had so many years ago. However a willingness to go with the flow, be an integral part of the community and change within, as needed, will create new and different opportunities.

I'm not sure who the president of MRID was when I joined, but I believe Jim Jones was president of MADC and Karl Kirchner was president of RID. In 1975, I was encouraged to stand for national RID certification (CSC, IT, TC, IC/TC, RSC). Although I didn't feel ready and hated testing, I trusted those encouraging comments, signed up, and tried to get ready. I was so frightened that I became physically sick.

Testing was before a panel, comprised of Deaf leaders and certified interpreters. Gordon Allen (Mr. Deaf Minnesota) was the chair of the panel and my prayer was "If I ever understand Deaf people and sign language, make that happen today." The stimuli were VTs and ATs of subjects I knew very little about - Transliteration tapes were about The Carlsbad Caverns and Life Cycle of the Fresh Water Eel in the Sargossa Sea and the VTs were

with Deaf persons telling stories (with colorful backgrounds, and I remember one was about bloomers because I missed that finger spelled word until the very end of the story when I blurted out, "Oh, the word was bloomers." I was so glad when the test was over. I'm



not sure if it was good (or not so good) that I knew every one of the panelists. They either really liked me or felt sorry for me because several weeks later I received my certificate award for CSC.

Although panels attempted to be neutral when scoring and awarding certification, they were also a bit biased. It was impossible to standardize testing with live panelists. Years later, I was very grateful to become a part of the development of the NIC ensuring the materials were standardized. We had to grow and be willing to change our approach to testing. RID has continued to do that over the years and it has come with its rewards and with its difficulties. As a teacher of interpreters, I have always stressed that the test is a snapshot in time. One can be best prepared by continuous practice, continuous learning through additional training and workshops and conferences, and doing the best one can during the test. And the test is the best we have to

indicate to consumers and interpreting agencies that we are recognized as knowledgeable and skilled in the languages we work between. Interpreting is a life-long learning process and being a part of the Deaf community and culture along with continuous training/education ensures we have the heart and mind to do the work.

During my career at TVI as an interpreter/actress, I know I grew tremendously because of the team I worked with. They supported me and taught me almost all aspects of filming as well as publishing books in sign language. As well I taught the first training programs for people to become interpreters. The programs were four weeks for professionals in the field of special or Deaf education and six weeks for persons wanting to become interpreters. The programs were short and we didn't have curriculum. I used sign dictionaries, (TJ O'Rourke, author), the Deaf community as guests, my experiences and what I had been taught. Many students became certified and worked as professional interpreters (only part time jobs were available).

I was very proud during my years at TVI, in the Deaf Club and school for the deaf to be asked to run for the board of the MADC (MN Association of Deaf Citizens), elected and served for a short time until I was offered a teaching job at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID at RIT) in 1977. The grant program I was working in at TVI ended and there were no full-time interpreting jobs that would support me as a single mother so I was encouraged to apply at a far-away place that in my mind was the Mecca of technical degree programs for Deaf and hard-of-hearing students. I was offered a job and with fear and trust, I packed up my children, filled a U-haul truck, and I drove my car and the kids, and Andy Vasnick drove the U-haul truck to a new and unknown world of teaching for 34 years, a Masters Degree, tenure, and several awards.

I have had a terrific and blessed career, filled with life-long friendships and memories. I fully retired from teaching and managing in 2008. I made the move to CA to start my life as Grandma, but because I have loved my professional and personal life, I continue to work as a professional community interpreter. I wish everyone who joined this rewarding professional life could have had all of the blessings I received. My heart continues to be a Minnesota heart and I wish your conference to be the best ever (virtual, in person, or hybrid). Thank you for asking me to be a small part of it.

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