

Host (0:12)

Can you introduce yourself?

Flora Clark
Keith Johnson
William Mayfield
Frances Gregory
George Calder

Host (0:57)

Tell us about the first time you met David Peikoff and his wife Polly.

Flora (1:02)

It was lovely sunny day in September and someone asked me to go outside as there was someone who wanted to meet me. We went outside and went up to a parked car full of people. A tall, dark-haired gentleman with an air of assurance stepped out of the car along with another man and two women. The gentleman introduced himself as David Peikoff and then presented his wife Polly. I asked who his companions were and the other woman, a woman of shorter stature, protested that they were simply friends who had come along for the ride. I found it somewhat surprising that they did not introduce themselves. David then introduced the couple as Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Rosnick stating that they were there providing support. He said that they were there to ask me if I would be interested in attending Ryerson or if I would prefer Gallaudet College. Recalling my years at a hearing high school, and realizing that Ryerson would offer a similar experience, I knew I wasn't interested in that prospect. On the other hand, the thought of going to Gallaudet where everyone would be using sign language conjured up a very different image, so I immediately responded that I wanted to attend Gallaudet. I asked David if I gave him my parent's address would he write them a letter, and he responded that he already had that information which was wonderful.

Keith (3:22)

I was living in Montreal, Quebec at the time and everywhere you went you would hear the name David Peikoff. When I moved to Toronto, and saw him for the first time I was struck by his eloquence.

I recall having some difficulty with my insurance policy "FRAT." My wife had joined soon after our marriage and she had some problems that needed to be resolved. Unfortunately her parents had no faith in the company so I went to David for help. Immediately David sat down at the typewriter and pounded out, using the hunt and peck method, a one and a half page letter – problem solved. It was a pleasure to work with him and I very much appreciated the help that he gave me. That's how I got to know David; it gave me a real insight into the type of man he was.

William (5:27)

I met David and his wife Polly in 1942, during the war, when I visited Toronto. I had a good conversation with them and found them both very intelligent people. David had a tremendous impact on the lives of Deaf people in Ontario. He was involved in a number of things including recruiting over one thousand members to OAD (Ontario Association of the Deaf).

Frances (6:30)

Around 1960 I was living in a boarding house for the Deaf, and the people responsible for the home were close friends with David and Polly. One day they came to visit; David was a big strapping fellow and my, didn't he like to tease me. He made quite an impression on me.

George (7:20)

It was around 1945 when I first met David and I would see him again from time to time. David was a fine, ambitious man of action working tirelessly to help and encourage others. He drew many into membership in FRAT and he lobbied government. He was truly a wonderful and courageous man.

Host (8:08)

Why do Deaf people consider David Peikoff a great Canadian leader?

Flora (8:15)

Well, first off, he worked very hard to get Deaf people the right to have a driver's license, and to prove that Deaf drivers were better than hearing drivers because they kept their eyes on the road, not on each other; a very good point to make! He also fought with the province, with the Department of Education, insisting that they had made a grave mistake by requiring Deaf children to be educated solely using the oral approach. David insisted that Deaf children *needed* sign language, mixed with some oral language, what was called total communication, to help them develop English skills.

There were other fights he had with the government. I saw the amount of correspondence, really a book's worth, all of which he typed himself. He was not going to be quiet about anything! He fought, he took them on; he was a force to be reckoned with. The teachers at the school for the Deaf I attended had nothing good to say about him, but in the end they had to accept him.

Another thing was that he got Deaf people to join associations and clubs of the Deaf and to learn how to deal with the government.

Keith (10:33)

The first time that I met David Peikoff he was already a leader and known across Canada. Everyone knew his name; that impressed me very much. He was known as a leader across the country.

From what I heard he fought with the government and politicians, as has been mentioned here, over the rights of Deaf people to have a driver's license. The government denied us that right saying Deaf people were not safe drivers, but David stood up to them. He got the insurance statistics and compared the safety record of Deaf people to hearing people and showed that Deaf people had very few accidents compared to the high number of accidents caused by hearing drivers. He proved that Deaf people *could* be good drivers and that we were safer drivers than hearing people. The politicians didn't know any of that and David was able to drive his point home. We were all very impressed with that victory and we are all very grateful to him

William (12:34)

I heard that David traveled to different communities calling upon many to subscribe to the OAD News and to contribute their local stories for publication. It was a good newsletter informing us about what was happening with Deaf people in different towns and cities. As well, David appealed to many to become members of FRAT, a good insurance company that provided life insurance for Deaf people for many years. He did many other things that I can't remember now but David did accomplish so many good things for Deaf people in Ontario, and perhaps even across Canada, but that is something I don't know about.

Frances (13:40)

That's right William. David *knew* that Deaf people could do anything that hearing people could do; he was confident of that.

George (14:02)

Though I was in America, I heard of David's many accomplishments in Canada but there's nothing more that I can add.

Host (14:30)

What do you see as David Peikoff's greatest strengths?

Flora (14:41)

His ability to get people on board and to unite them in a common goal.

Politics lost a great man when David lost his hearing. He came here to Canada from Kiev, along with this family, knowing no English, but he quickly picked it up. While he did get help from his hearing sister, it was David who worked so hard to become fluent. He learned the trade of printing and lived in Winnipeg. He then went to Gallaudet where he met a Deaf woman, from a similar religious background, and fell in love with her. Unbeknownst to him she too had grown up in Winnipeg though they had never met there. Anyways, I forget all the details, but they later married and moved to Toronto.

David spoke at a Canada leadership club debate where his views on Deaf people's right to get a driver's license inspired many Deaf people, and the clubs they belonged to, to publish articles on that topic.

Another thing was that he and his friend, Jack Morrison, applied to the Northern Miner's Printing Press to get the first OAD News published. I went to help with proof reading the copy to make sure there were no errors. It was pretty well done and was a good way to clarify issues for people. The teachers and counselors at my school tried to tear up any copies of the OAD News declaring that it was a bad paper, but they had never even read it! They never did understand the capabilities of Deaf people.

When I went to Gallaudet, David Peikoff came down to see how I was doing. The first time that he visited I had just had my appendix removed and he started joking with me, but I was unable to laugh because of the stitches. You can only imagine the pain, but oh well, that was David – he was an interesting character!

Keith (17:47)

The more I saw of David, the more I realized what a fighter he was. He was very involved in fundraising and growing support for the Deaf community. He was a skilled orator and raised money for various causes that helped Deaf people, especially the OAD News. He also established a scholarship fund for Deaf students who otherwise could not afford to go to college. He worked hard at getting financial support for a scholarship program. That was a tremendous help to those who otherwise couldn't have gone to school. That was a very important accomplishment.

William (19:05)

I heard that David did many good things. He urged Deaf people, who were smart enough, to attend Gallaudet College. David could be so convincing and captivating that, even though some Deaf people initially were not interested, they would end up subscribing to the OAD News and becoming members of FRAT, as well. I heard that David battled with government concerning business opportunities for Deaf people, the right for Deaf people to be able to drive, and many other such things. He did well.

Frances (20:04)

David Peikoff was opposed to the oral approach to teaching Deaf students. He believed that teachers should use sign language in school and that was the way that students would really learn and grow.

George (20:34)

I understand that David was a motivated and determined fundraiser raising more than \$1,000,000 from across Canada and the United States for Gallaudet University. That was the kind of man he was.

Host (21:06)

What was David Peikoff's greatest contribution to the Deaf community?

Flora (21:08)

David encouraged Deaf people to work together, and to become organized. Some of the things he did made hearing people angry. He supported "Total Communication" which meant using sign and speech. He felt that, if a Deaf person happened to have an aptitude for speech, then there was nothing wrong with that, however even so he felt that sign would assist with identifying words that were impossible to lip-read. Ninety nine percent of hearing people really don't even think about how they speak or enunciate words, making them almost impossible to lip-read. For profoundly Deaf people, back then, hearing aids were really not much help at all. There have been some small minor improvements since then, but still as soon as a baby is identified as being Deaf using total communication right away is the best approach. Research has now shown that David was right all along in all that he had said about communication and education, but even so there are many hearing people who are resistant to those ideas.

David had so much trouble with the outright stubbornness of the Ontario government that he decided to accept an offer to move back to the United States and help with fundraising for Gallaudet, among other things.

The American Deaf community, after researching his background, were very appreciative of all of his accomplishments; they recognized him for the work he had done in helping each province establish their own provincial Deaf association, for the number of Deaf people who were able to attend Gallaudet because of his efforts, and the many other things that he had done. They arranged for him to go to England to be given a medal by the Queen herself. That was after he had had a stroke; but he continued to work for the good of the Deaf community even after the stroke.

Keith (24:16)

David insisted that all deaf people come together as a community and cooperate with each other. His point was that Deaf people needed to get together and to get along and so on. David made the case to politicians and government, impressing upon them that Deaf people could do all the work that hearing people could do. Again and again, David emphasized and provided evidence that Deaf people 'can do' and that Deaf people could achieve their goals. This made the community grow and become strong and we can see the results of what he did even to this day. That is what David had to offer through all his persistent lobbying. I'm truly thankful to David for what he has done. Thank you, David.

William (26:20)

David convinced many Deaf people to become members of OAD and to provide OAD news from their communities. As well, David established the Canadian Hearing Society (CHS) as Deaf people had difficulty obtaining employment. David contended with the government and as a result, CHS for the Deaf in Toronto was established. Later, hearing people took over the organization. Now what else...I think that's all.

Frances (27:16)

I don't have anything to add, you all have said so much about David Peikoff and recognized all of his impressive accomplishments.

George (27:35)

I was in America at the time so I didn't know about him (his activities) until afterwards.

Host (27:49)

Why did David put so much emphasis on education, why was he so passionate about it?

Flora (28:04)

Well one thing that David Peikoff didn't like to see was Deaf people peddling "ABC fingerspelling" cards. He discovered that those Deaf people had been taught to do so by teachers in the school for the Deaf and that the government was aware of it. Many of the peddlers hated Peikoff, but some listened to him and got jobs and in the end felt better about themselves. Some however continued to be very angry with David, though perhaps they were just crooks who wanted the easy life.

David traveled from province to province, all across Canada, inspiring Deaf people to do better. Ontario was a tough battleground because the government thought that the oral approach was the best method for teaching Deaf children. The government never did any research on deafness and it wasn't until after David's death that two female researchers looked at the effects of sign language on infants, both Deaf and hearing. From that point onwards there has been more interest in the topic and today we see improvements in education with more and more "Total Communication" being used; the movement is spreading, slowly, but certainly spreading.

Not only that but some Deaf Canadians established the Cultural Society of the Deaf, inspired by some of the things that David had done in the States, and oh boy, that was wonderful to see that take hold.

Keith (30:56)

David Peikoff was deeply passionate about Deaf people going to Gallaudet College. It's now a university but it was a college then. He searched for those who wanted to attend whose families may have been poor and unable to afford

Gallaudet's tuition fees; he worked tirelessly to raise the money to send them to school. I don't know how many were sponsored, perhaps a few. (Flora states that there were many students.) Many students were sponsored. David was successful in helping bright students attend Gallaudet and not squander their talents. The work he did was truly amazing and the number of well educated deaf people increased. Thank you, David.

William (32:44)

After that David observed that Deaf people were poorly educated so he decided to go the school for the deaf in Belleville. He asked for and got permission from the superintendent to visit the different classrooms where speech and signs were being used. Upon entering one classroom, when the teacher selected one of the students to 'speak' for their guest, David intervened. He anticipated that the teacher would select the one student she could rely upon to demonstrate good speech skills. So David insisted upon selecting a student and the student he chose spoke very poorly, much to the embarrassment of the teacher.

Frances (33:50)

Really I can't think of anything to add to what has already been said other than to say what a wonderful man David Peikoff was.

George (34:13)

It's okay. I have more nothing to add.

Host (34:20)

When Deaf people speak of David Peikoff, what do they say?

William (34:33)

Most Deaf people who knew David always spoke well of him. He'd often travel to different towns to encourage deaf people to become members of FRAT and OAD. He did so many things like this. Thank you.

George (35:01)

As I think of David, I recognize that he was so well known as he worked and traveled extensively meeting so many people from Vancouver, BC to Nova Scotia. Deaf people held David in such high regard; he stood out from the rest of us. He was courageous and he was without shame. Indeed, he was a wonderful man.

Host (35:33)

What do you remember most about David Peikoff?

Flora (35:58) (overlapping with Keith)

His sense of humour.

Keith

You go ahead, I can't think at the moment.

Flora (36:00)

I think of him joking. One time I was having supper with him and his wife, we were having chicken legs. He said something that made me look to Polly and she immediately told me to watch David and those legs. Sure enough I looked back to find that he had taken my chicken legs right off my plate!

Another time Polly was teaching me to make potato latkes for supper and when David came home Polly told me to go hide in the closet behind the coats. David opened the closet door and I could see him telling Polly how he had tried to help some hearing people in his office, and about some problems that he was dealing with on behalf of some Deaf people. As he reached in to put away his coat, "yikes" there I was in the closet – my, didn't I startle him – that's how I remember him, that and other funny stories that I recall.

Keith (37:37)

I wasn't as involved with David at that time or in his social circles so I have less to say at this point.

William (37:56)

I know that David was so busy yet he faithfully and regularly attended hockey games. And he even performed in plays for the Deaf a few times. It was surprising that he found time to do these things in light of all the things he did for Deaf people.

Francis (38:36)

My memory is of a man who loved to joke with young people like me. That sense of humour was what made me grow to love him.

Host (38:56)

What is your finest memory of David Peikoff?

Flora (39:10)

David always had a good word for those Deaf people who tried. If a Deaf person organized a party, David would say that they hosted a very good party or that a new idea offered by another Deaf person was wonderful, and so on, spreading the word that Deaf people could do *anything*! He would be really broken hearted whenever someone Deaf failed, perhaps ending up in jail, even if it was their own fault.

Keith (40:11)

What David did for me had to do with my education. I moved to Toronto with my parents and they wanted me to continue with my education. As I had been ill for a long time, I decided to return to school instead of going back to work so I visited David and asked his advice regarding the best place I could go and he

strongly recommended the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. David asked his hearing daughter to make the long distance phone call to the Hartford, Connecticut American School for the Deaf in the States. She explained that I was an older student and they said they would welcome me as a student with special status. Afterwards, David cautioned that I would have to work hard at the school. The next day, my mother and I packed up the car and we drove directly to the Hartford School. That's how I arrived there. The school helped me a lot. I learned a trade and I almost went to Gallaudet College. They certainly helped me a lot. It is the oldest school for the Deaf established in 1817. I thank David for guiding me there. The experience left a deep impression on me.

William (43:12)

I've never seen another Deaf person do as well as David and I'm very much impressed by this.

Francis (43:48)

I don't really have much to say.

George (43:54)

(gestures that he has nothing to say)

Host (44:07)

If you had one word to describe David Peikoff, what would it be?

Flora (44:15)

Forceful, yes forceful.

Keith (44:37)

Oh, you're asking me! I thought you were asking Bill. In a word, he was very, very encouraging. He got us to pay attention to the important things and to get involved. He was a strong influence and very encouraging. He was that kind of person.

William (45:10)

David could be a friend to any Deaf person.

Francis (45:18)

He always encouraged young people.

George (45:36)

He was a good soul. He was ambitious, like a soldier, traveling extensively.

Host (45:48)

Can you think of anything else I should ask?

Flora (46:05)

I'm trying to think. I would say that David was forceful, warm-hearted, and fun.

I would ask "Did David Peikoff have a positive influence on hearing people?" The answer to that is "yes." He helped out his friend's son and that boy later grew up to become a detective inspector in the Toronto Police force. He currently works in parole as a supervisor; that was a real step up for that young fellow.

Keith (47:32)

Let me think and I'll come up with something. All I know was that when I talked with him he could be funny. The other thing was that David tended to speak with a sense of humour; to encourage us and make us laugh. With all the people he met, he never looked down his nose at anyone or held anyone in contempt. Everyone he met, he encouraged. He was really a family man of the deaf world, a family man of the deaf world. That was David!

William (48:45)

David had the right to move to Washington, DC, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Francis (49:06)

I have nothing more to add; I would agree with Keith's comments.

George (49:08)

I've nothing else to say.