

1 (RECORDED INTERVIEW TAKEN WEDNESDAY, MAY 22, 2013)

2 DR. ROMAN PETRYSHYN, INTERVIEWED BY DEBRA RUSSELL:

3 MS. DEBRA RUSSELL: Thanks for doing this interview,
4 Roman. I really appreciate it.

5 I was thinking maybe we could start with you
6 helping us to understand the nature of your work in
7 the Centre and how you came to do this work.

8 DR. ROMAN PETRYSHYN: Well, you know, as I think about
9 the last 14 or 15 years, I realize that the Peikoff
10 Chair and the Western Canadian Centre for Deaf
11 Studies has had a very similar trajectory as my
12 centre.

13 We were both imagined and brought into
14 existence in the era of multiculturalism when the
15 Federal and Provincial Governments were supporting
16 minority cultures in Alberta.

17 And I came to learn in talking with Michael
18 over the years about how the Centre came to be that
19 it was the same process. He followed the same
20 process that I followed, but we didn't know each
21 other. We were doing the same sort of thing and
22 even with the same person in the Federal Government
23 that was helping us, but independently of each
24 other.

25 And it was only in later years that I came to
26 realize that we both ended up having endowed chairs
27 with centres devoted to a particular field of study.



1 So in my case, I helped to create and still run
2 the Ukrainian Resource and Development Centre at
3 MacEwan University, and our purpose is to encourage
4 research and then act on that research to intervene
5 in a development process, particularly in Ukraine
6 but also with the Ukrainian community here in
7 Canada.

8 So over the years, we've been involved in
9 projects -- in a variety of projects. We've been
10 involved in business education in Ukraine; in
11 transferring nursing curricula out to Ukraine; agri
12 business, so we've had exchange of farmers and so
13 on. All of this done not solely on our own
14 resources, because we're a very small staff, but in
15 partnership with content experts in each of these
16 areas.

17 So my centre is in the business of doing
18 applied research, understanding where there's a
19 possibility for a project, looking for funds,
20 looking for people to carry out the project, putting
21 the whole team together, and then carrying out those
22 projects to make a difference.

23 And in a variety of fields I think both in
24 Canada and Ukraine, our centre at MacEwan has had
25 some impact. And I like to think that we've done
26 that in the field of deaf studies, and we'll
27 continue to be doing it for a few more years at any



1 rate.

2 So that's how our two centres have come to work
3 together for almost 15 years now.

4 DEBRA: And your centre is older than 15
5 years though?

6 ROMAN: We were created in 1987. When
7 was --

8 DEBRA: '86.

9 ROMAN: '86, yes. So almost
10 simultaneously. But as I say, we didn't know of
11 each other or even that we were doing this. I think
12 it was just in the spirit of the times that the
13 government and community politics was such that
14 minority cultures were being supported.

15 And I ran with that idea in the Ukrainian
16 community, and of course Michael Rodda ran with that
17 idea, you know, in the field of deafness and hard of
18 hearing studies.

19 DEBRA: And is there a centre that's like
20 your centre in any other place across Canada?

21 ROMAN: No. There is here at the
22 University of Alberta a number of other centres in
23 Ukrainian studies, so we have -- there's a centre in
24 modern history, contemporary history; there's the
25 Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies that
26 incorporates a variety of such projects in language
27 education and folklore studies.



1 But there is not a research and development
2 centre devoted to engaging with contemporary issues,
3 so ours is the only one really in Canada.

4 DEBRA: Wonderful.

5 ROMAN: Yeah.

6 DEBRA: And so then it sounds like in
7 that course of history, your paths crossed, and you
8 and Michael met perhaps through Ihor. I'm not sure.

9 ROMAN: Yes.

10 DEBRA: Can you describe a little bit
11 about how that happened?

12 ROMAN: Well, we were a fairly young
13 centre initially focussing on Ukrainian Canadian
14 projects in dance and culture and choral music and
15 so on, in the arts in particular.

16 But in 1991, the Soviet Union, which had been
17 an enormous political entity with 15 different
18 republics in it, essentially dissolved almost
19 overnight in the space of a few years.

20 What some people would call an empire, really a
21 state of over 250 million people and so on, so
22 something that rivalled the United States in power
23 at the time, it simply collapsed on its own
24 inefficiency and bankrupted itself as a country,
25 financially and morally in many respects,
26 politically.

27 And out of that emerged independent countries,

1 15 independent countries, one of which was Ukraine,
2 and perhaps the most westerly oriented of all of the
3 other countries that made up the Soviet Union.

4 So when that happened, there began a lot of
5 contact between west and east because travel in the
6 Soviet Union had been very limited since World War
7 II, at the end of World War II. And people needed
8 to meet each other and needed to simply understand
9 how these two societies might interact in the
10 future.

11 And my centre at that point turned its
12 attention to working with projects in Ukraine, and
13 we engaged, as I say, in the agri business area with
14 business education and so on and continue to do that
15 to the present time, because the need continues to
16 be there to modernize their educational system and
17 westernize it so that it's a more democratic and a
18 more open society.

19 So it was at that point that one day a lady
20 walked into my office and started talking to me
21 about her brother, Ihor Kobel, who worked at the
22 School for the Deaf in Lviv, and asked if there was
23 any way that our centre might make it possible for
24 him to come to Edmonton and to engage the deaf
25 community here and to compare their system of
26 education with the one here.

27 So I agreed, and Ihor Kobel traveled to



1 Edmonton and spent a considerable amount of time
2 with the Alberta School for the Deaf. And during
3 that visit, came and visited the University of
4 Alberta and met Michael Rodda. And so it was this
5 third person, his presence, that brought Michael and
6 myself together and brought our centres together to
7 a working relationship.

8 And as I say, the rest is history, because
9 Michael and I in many ways found it very easy to
10 work with one another. I think I could understand
11 his passion and his commitment to his field, and he
12 certainly was open to learning about mine. It was
13 an ongoing learning process for both of us, but I
14 very quickly understood that he was an individual of
15 great commitment but of sort of -- I might even call
16 him a warrior for his field.

17 He fought absolutely the good fight in a
18 pragmatic way.

19 DEBRA: Yes.

20 ROMAN: Everything -- he had been through
21 many struggles to achieve the Centre, to create the
22 Peikoff endowment, and I have no doubt lost as many
23 as he perhaps won, because that's just simply the
24 nature of that kind of role, that you don't win them
25 all.

26 But we understood each other, and he -- he
27 showed an immediate willingness to travel, to engage



1 his students in this field of deafness in Ukraine;
2 and he showed a willingness to -- you know, to
3 learn, to be open to all these experiences, new
4 experiences.

5 So I think we just hit it off and began trying
6 to see where this would go, this combination of
7 deafness and learning about the former Soviet Union
8 and how we might intervene in that society.

9 DEBRA: And so then what was the first
10 project-oriented work that you did together in
11 Ukraine?

12 ROMAN: Well, with Ihor Kobel's
13 stimulating us to visit Ukraine, we decided in 1999
14 to visit Ukraine. And really there were two
15 institutions that we were able to visit at the time:
16 One was Ihor Kobel's school. We needed to actually
17 visit the School for the Deaf in Lviv, which is in
18 western Ukraine; but then we also needed to visit
19 the university that Ihor graduated from with his
20 second degree in Deafness Studies, and that's the
21 Dragomanov National Pedagogical University in the
22 city of Kyjiv.

23 As it turned out, that university is -- the
24 prior was the one and only prior university dealing
25 with deafness at the time. Much has changed since
26 those years, but there was -- at the centre of their
27 system was this university and these programs.

1 And so we met with them and met with the leader
2 of their program, Dr. Formachiva, who in February, I
3 think, of 2000 then returned to visit here --

4 DEBRA: Yes.

5 ROMAN: -- and came with their most
6 senior person, Yamachenko, who actually was the
7 leading authority who created the new Academy of
8 Pedagogical Science of Ukraine after independence.

9 DEBRA: Okay.

10 ROMAN: There's a lot to explain here,
11 but the Soviet system was organized on a vertical
12 basis, and we needed to learn how to operate in that
13 system because decisions around changes to
14 curricula, changes to programs, rested in the hands
15 of a small group of people at the top of the
16 pinnacle.

17 So change had to come from top down, and so
18 knowing that, they both came to Canada where Michael
19 introduced them very much to various programs we
20 have in deafness studies here in Edmonton and
21 particularly talked to them about sign language --

22 DEBRA: Okay.

23 ROMAN: -- and the importance of sign
24 language. The reason being is that the Soviet
25 system had taken on a philosophy that emerged in the
26 1920s, as I understand it, of lip reading as the
27 primary way of teaching.



1 And being a very bureaucratized system, once
2 they had accepted that philosophy, they simply
3 carried it forward for the next 70 years. It was
4 very difficult despite people trying there to
5 modernize and change their form of pedagogy. It was
6 very difficult to do away with those original
7 principles.

8 And so when we arrived in Ukraine, I always
9 like to tell the story about how when you enter a
10 school, there are ten rules that are posted on a
11 board, and there is one of the rules clearly written
12 that sign language was disallowed as a language for
13 the educational process for teaching.

14 Kids of course communicated in sign language --
15 DEBRA: Of course.

16 ROMAN: -- and Michael could see that and
17 many of the teachers communicate with the children,
18 but formally the State had banned sign language as a
19 form of communication in the teaching process.

20 So Michael, I think, had decided then that that
21 was something that he was going to change. And from
22 the very beginning, he advocated for both with
23 Dr. Formachiva and Yamachenko to accept sign
24 language.

25 As it happened, Dr. Formachiva never did change
26 her opinion --

27 DEBRA: No.



1 ROMAN: -- and I think still holds it to
2 this day.

3 DEBRA: Well, when we speak about
4 warriors, I suspect that word would describe her as
5 well.

6 ROMAN: Yes. Michael never gave up on
7 her. You know, for a dozen years or more, he
8 maintained relationships and kept trying to persuade
9 her.

10 But Yamachenko on the other hand, even though
11 he was older and so on, seemed to be supportive as
12 soon as he could see the outcomes of teaching
13 through sign language.

14 And so what happened after this initial visit
15 was that we decided to do several things: First of
16 all, we decided to organize a summer camp. And
17 Formachiva to her credit assisted Michael fully.
18 They arranged a beautiful location, Artec, which is
19 a children's youth centre in Crimea. And they had
20 parents and teachers and students all come together.
21 Really an unheard of practice prior to that.

22 It seems a very simple idea to westerners of
23 course and normal practice in the west, but it was
24 not normal for Soviet teachers of the deaf to
25 consider the opinions of parents and certainly not
26 to listen to children.

27 And the fact that Michael would bring them

1 together in a recreational environment allowed
2 people to interact as people and to appreciate each
3 other, but then also to begin to learn various
4 methods for teaching children through games and so
5 on. He demonstrated various techniques from western
6 pedagogy for them.

7 So this turned out to be the beginning of a
8 series of summer camps that went on for over ten
9 years and camps that were held all over Ukraine that
10 involved perhaps as many as -- well, well over a
11 thousand children and parents.

12 DEBRA: That's impressive.

13 ROMAN: And what happened is that the
14 parents and the kids really took to this idea of
15 using sign language; the children quite naturally,
16 because they already were users of sign language.

17 And when Canadian students like Anastasia Benza
18 or, you know, others showed up -- Michael always
19 argued that they should come on these trips, that he
20 always made a point of involving students.

21 And when the deaf kids in Ukraine met young
22 people signing from Canada, they found a way to
23 communicate very quickly; and the Ukrainian parents
24 were absolutely shocked by this idea that foreigners
25 could communicate with their children when they as
26 parents for years from the birth of their child very
27 often were not able to communicate. And they



1 couldn't understand why that was so or why their
2 system didn't encourage sign language.

3 So parents very quickly became advocates for
4 sign language, and Michael of course knew that this
5 would happen. And these summer camps made it
6 possible to start a movement, really an action by
7 parents where they began to learn more about signing
8 and advocate for it. And of course there were many
9 teachers in these schools that became supporters of
10 the parents and advocates themselves of using sign
11 language.

12 And so that was -- that was a very major
13 contribution, I think, that Michael made, because
14 once -- once signing became legitimated by the
15 presence of these Canadians and professors to boot,
16 there's no stopping it. It's gone forward, and it's
17 continuing year after year to earn its place in the
18 Ukrainian society, particularly in the deaf
19 community.

20 DEBRA: How did you fund those camps?

21 ROMAN: How did we find them?

22 DEBRA: How did you fund them? Like,
23 where did that money come from? I mean, it's no
24 small task to organize summer camps.

25 ROMAN: Yes, yes. Well, again, this is
26 something that with Michael's help, we created a
27 society, just a non-profit society called the Canada

1 Ukraine Alliance for Deaf and Hard of Hearing
2 Persons. We created one here, and we created one in
3 Ukraine.

4 DEBRA: Okay.

5 ROMAN: And these two societies carried
6 the responsibility for organizing summer camps and
7 funding them. The Ukraine side carried the
8 responsibility for the organization. And I must
9 say, their schools also carried -- provided in kind
10 contributions in food and various different ways and
11 bussing costs and so on in Ukraine.

12 But it was the Canadian side that provided the
13 cash or the money that was needed to cover those
14 areas that weren't covered by the schools in
15 Ukraine.

16 And so over the years, with the help of good
17 people in the community here in Alberta in
18 particular, but not only Alberta -- people helped us
19 from other places, including the Canadian Society
20 for the Deaf that processed our tax receipts and so
21 on -- but in general we provided about \$5,000 a year
22 for over ten years to allow these camps to be run.

23 And it was a very good investment, and it had
24 its effect. There's no doubt it's had its effect,
25 and I believe it's still a very useful mechanism if
26 one wants to make a social change.

27 DEBRA: Yes.



1 ROMAN: And, you know, using a
2 recreational environment to decide on a course of
3 action with people returning home intent on
4 achieving something before next summer, it's a good
5 strategy, and it worked well.

6 DEBRA: And the power of parents.

7 ROMAN: And the power of parents,
8 absolutely. There's no stopping them once they make
9 up their mind.

10 There's a lot still to be done of course,
11 because the Ukrainian Sign Language was not -- was
12 not documented. With the exception of a couple of
13 pamphlets that had been produced during Soviet
14 times, there were no handbooks or guidebooks or --
15 that was before video and before the Internet of
16 course, and so there really were no educational
17 materials or resources.

18 DEBRA: Which is interesting, because
19 Russian Sign Language has had some early research
20 that parallels the American Sign Language in the
21 late '60s, but again western and eastern worlds, no
22 exchange of information.

23 ROMAN: Yes. It's a great shame, and
24 it's something that we regretted that scientists and
25 researchers didn't have freedom of communication and
26 freedom of access to each other, because I'm sure
27 both sides could learn much from each other, as was



1 the case with this whole project.

2 But Michael suggested that we begin to
3 videotape people signing, various kinds of
4 communications. And I remember buying this small
5 video camera, because the Ukrainian side didn't have
6 the resources for it.

7 And so they began to make videos and began to
8 classify and categorize them, until you came along
9 and really took that project and mentored the
10 Ukrainian side.

11 In 2004, it should be said that the contact
12 that Michael had made by doing this work with
13 Professor Bondar at the Academy of Pedagogical
14 Sciences -- Bondar headed the Institute for Special
15 Pedagogy where Deafness was located, and he was a
16 very progressive person and had agreed to come to
17 Canada and visit Michael in 2004.

18 And at that time, we signed an agreement
19 between the University of Alberta and MacEwan
20 University and Dragomanov University and
21 particularly the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences.

22 And so once the Academy was fully committed to
23 advancing the cause of deaf studies, Professor
24 Bondar created a research laboratory. It initially
25 had eight positions, and I can recall, Debra, you
26 insisting that half of those positions be given to
27 persons who are deaf or persons who are fully fluent



1 in sign language.

2 This too was a big shock for Professor Bondar
3 to employ people in these research institutes, which
4 is considered a very high level, of people who had
5 perhaps no university training or perhaps some
6 university training, but certainly not postdoctoral
7 training and research.

8 But the authority that Canadians had developed
9 had grown to such a level that Professor Bondar
10 listened to the advice he was given. He did employ
11 people in this new research laboratory who relied on
12 sign language and began formally to do videotaping
13 and research on Ukrainian Sign Language.

14 And that too, I would say, is something that
15 has been continuing since it's been started and is
16 now part of the research -- a permanent part of the
17 research agenda and structure of the Academy of
18 Pedagogical Sciences; which it should be said then
19 led to sign language being allowed as a language of
20 education, for two hours a week albeit.

21 So far it's only two hours a week, but it is
22 now permitted by regulations of the Ministry of
23 Education as a language for teaching purposes in the
24 boarding schools where deaf students reside.

25 DEBRA: Those are major changes.

26 ROMAN: Those are major changes. And --

27 DEBRA: And started from --



1 ROMAN: So not only did sign language get
2 legitimized and established with the parents, it has
3 been now recognized as a legitimate subject for
4 research in the institutions devoted for this
5 purpose.

6 So these are -- these are very significant
7 changes which I do not believe will be reversed. On
8 the contrary, they seem to be spreading and growing
9 and gaining strength as teachers of the deaf begin
10 taking advantage of these new openings and these new
11 opportunities.

12 So out of all of this process has come an
13 association of teachers of the deaf in Ukraine. As
14 I understand it, it's a national group, unlike
15 Canada. We don't have such a national group in
16 Canada.

17 DEBRA: We don't have it.

18 ROMAN: And they are very much advocates
19 for the advancement of this field.

20 So in all of these ways, Michael truly was a
21 champion for the deaf students in Ukraine and
22 teachers as well, and he brought -- he brought his
23 expertise and his willingness to be open to all
24 these experiences and to kind of roll with it year
25 in, year out, for -- as I say, for close to 15
26 years.

27 He worked at this while he was at the



1 University of Alberta. Then once he retired, he
2 came over to MacEwan University and continued to
3 work at this with the Ukrainian Centre at MacEwan
4 University.

5 DEBRA: I don't think Michael ever really
6 retired. You know, I think he may have moved
7 institutions, but I don't think he retired.

8 And one of my memories of being with Michael
9 and you in Ukraine the first time I went is that
10 work is what he did. And so I think we began our
11 mornings at 7, and we held meetings and traveled
12 around and did the work of the project. And if we
13 collapsed into bed around 10:30 at night, that was
14 an early evening, it seems to me.

15 But he was tireless, it seemed like, in that
16 work --

17 ROMAN: Yes.

18 DEBRA: -- and yet could touch everyone
19 from students to the highest level of political
20 influence.

21 So can you tell me a little bit about how he
22 and you then became academicians?

23 ROMAN: Yes.

24 DEBRA: Where did that come from, and
25 what is that?

26 ROMAN: Well, the concept of an
27 academician in the former Soviet Union and still is



1 present in the independent Ukraine has to do with
2 the structure of how education is structured. So
3 unlike North America, in the former Soviet Union and
4 in some European countries, teaching and research
5 are formally divided into two systems.

6 So teaching takes place at colleges,
7 universities in Ukraine, as it does here; but in
8 Ukraine, there's an entire system devoted to
9 research so that in general it's in every field. So
10 it would be in physics, in the sciences, you know,
11 in law, in medicine. There are separate what are
12 called academies.

13 And these are pyramids of structure, because
14 the universities, colleges being at the bottom of
15 the pyramid with students and professors, but out of
16 that come a small group of people who enter into
17 this research structure.

18 So in addition to what role they might offer by
19 way of teaching, they have a separate title as
20 researchers who prepare Ph.D.s in research in the
21 field as opposed to teachers in the field.

22 So an academician would be someone at the top
23 of his field and a member of the Academy -- of his
24 own academy, of medicine, of law, or pedagogy; and
25 would have perhaps a hundred, 200, some might have
26 as many as 500 researchers under them; separate
27 facilities, separate budgets devoted solely to



1 research.

2 So the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences is a
3 category that relates to the field of education of
4 deaf students, and Michael was nominated as an
5 international member of the Academy.

6 DEBRA: Are there many international
7 members?

8 ROMAN: No. There are very few. In
9 fact, the Academy itself I think has 120 members for
10 Ukraine --

11 DEBRA: Right.

12 ROMAN: -- Ukraine being a country of,
13 say, about 46 million today with hundreds of
14 post-secondary institutions. So you can imagine
15 that if you're in the circle of 120 people --

16 DEBRA: Yes.

17 ROMAN: -- in this research system, that
18 you have prestige and an ability to operate that
19 others do not.

20 The Academy also has a special role in advising
21 the Government, education being a Federal
22 jurisdiction in Ukraine, advising the Ministry of
23 Education about changes it might make to its system.

24 So that when an academician and his institute
25 of course and the research that goes into this kind
26 of recommendation puts forward a series of ideas to
27 the Ministry, those are listened to very carefully.



1 And so Michael was able to influence people at
2 the very top of this pyramid about sign language,
3 about the need to study sign language and document
4 it, about the need to speak to parents about the
5 early detection of deafness, about the social model
6 of deafness as well as the medical model of how it
7 might be looked at and dealt with.

8 He was able to work very closely with Professor
9 Bondar and other people at the Academy to
10 communicate some of these ideas. This is that
11 process of legitimation I talked about earlier, that
12 it's because of Michael's status as a professor in
13 Canada and his publications and so on that allowed
14 him to speak on a peer basis with people in the
15 Academy. And they thought highly enough of the
16 recommendations and work that he did to offer him
17 this honorary appointment, which he accepted and I
18 think surely deserved.

19 DEBRA: It seems like both of you surely
20 deserved that honour. And it's clear that both of
21 you operated from a systemic point of view; you
22 know, that from what you have described, individual
23 projects were important, but it seemed like both of
24 you stood back and said, What would be the largest
25 way to impact a society?

26 And so it seems like you've worked the
27 political processes, the government processes, the

1 economic processes to bring around sustainable
2 long-term change as opposed to a short-term project
3 change.

4 ROMAN: Yeah, absolutely. You know,
5 you're right that the end purpose is to improve the
6 system and the services that are provided.

7 But in Michael's case -- and I think I learned
8 a lot about this from him -- is that he would start
9 with very small things and just continue to leverage
10 them into this larger picture.

11 So, for example, this business of supporting
12 students, I watched as he brought students right
13 into the Alliance and would take them to Ukraine; so
14 that a number of his younger students -- Amber
15 Schultz, for example, a student recently -- I think
16 2010 -- she went to the summer camp in Ukraine
17 because of Michael's wish that a student be taken.

18 Now, it worked the other way as well, because
19 once the Ukrainians saw that he brought students,
20 that kicked off another dynamic; and Ihor Kobel, who
21 was a teacher, then approached Michael about
22 becoming a Master's student here at U of A.

23 So Michael immediately picked up and acted on
24 that, so Ihor Kobel in fact came to the University
25 of Alberta, completed his Master's and his Ph.D.,
26 financed to a large part by Michael's efforts
27 through the University of Alberta and his own work

1 of course in doing the research and studies. And
2 then Ihor returned now with a Canadian Ph.D. to
3 Ukraine and is invited to become a professor at the
4 Ukrainian Catholic University.

5 So he had been a teacher in the School for the
6 Deaf; now he's been invited to work to develop
7 programs for deaf students at the Ukrainian Catholic
8 University, which allowed Ihor to be invited to
9 Gallaudet University in Washington on a full-ride
10 scholarship so that he could learn more in his work.

11 So you can see how Michael's insistence on
12 having undergraduate students attend triggered other
13 people to act in a way which eventually is the
14 question of creating a new program --

15 DEBRA: Absolutely.

16 ROMAN: -- at a university. So I think
17 these are very wise lessons that he demonstrated.
18 And, you know, I take and learn from those kinds
19 of -- attend to the small -- smaller projects
20 because they certainly can become larger ones.

21 DEBRA: What I learned from Michael as
22 well in that work is that it's about the importance
23 of building relationships and long-term
24 relationships and letting them decide what they
25 need, when they need it, why they need it, and being
26 there to offer support and resources but not
27 necessarily leading but having them lead.

1 And so I think he left us with many lessons.

2 ROMAN: Yes, he did.

3 DEBRA: For those of us who are
4 remaining, unfortunately Michael has passed now, and
5 so we carry on his legacy in Ukraine.

6 What do you think is next? What would Michael
7 want us to do as the next steps?

8 ROMAN: Well, I think he'd be very --
9 well, I know he's very impressed because he saw you
10 working on this question of codifying sign language
11 in Ukraine and fighting for deaf teachers who are in
12 the residential boarding schools to be given the
13 role of teaching in sign language.

14 They're there. The resource is there. It's
15 just that even though some of these teachers -- deaf
16 teachers have completed their university and so on,
17 they have been underutilized within the residential
18 boarding schools.

19 And once again, we need to continue to
20 legitimate the role that sign language has and to
21 invite these deaf teachers at the boarding schools
22 back into the classroom where they should be --

23 DEBRA: Yes.

24 ROMAN: -- and to empower them to use
25 their skills so that they become, first of all,
26 effective teachers to these deaf kids, teaching, you
27 know, physics, science, history, and so on; and also

1 role models so that deaf children in Ukraine can see
2 that their future occupations don't have to be
3 limited solely to, you know, technical occupations
4 of the kind that the deaf have had in the past in
5 various kinds of factories and so on.

6 But they can also work in the field of
7 education and in fact can be a lot better at it than
8 perhaps some teachers who don't have the skill level
9 to teach sign language.

10 DEBRA: Not unlike our Ukrainian
11 bilingual schools or our French immersion schools.

12 ROMAN: Yes. Native speakers are of
13 course the best.

14 So I think that Michael was very proud of the
15 way that you have picked up on some of the leads
16 that are there, recognized them, and are again
17 providing leadership and mentorship to the people
18 who can make a difference in this system in Ukraine.

19 And so I think if we keep chipping away perhaps
20 at small projects, then we'll make a difference. It
21 does take a few years, but you've been at it now, I
22 think, perhaps six or eight years yourself so that
23 you're beginning to understand the cycle, you know,
24 this 10- or 12-year cycle.

25 But certainly each cycle is at a higher level
26 than the previous one. And I think the vision of
27 deaf students going to universities -- the ones who

1 are interested and talented of course -- and
2 graduating from graduate programs in universities,
3 the future in Ukraine is something that one can
4 envision today thanks to the work that both you and
5 Michael have done.

6 DEBRA: There's something I should have
7 asked you about Michael that I haven't.

8 ROMAN: Please do.

9 DEBRA: So if you had to describe sort of
10 his three top characteristics -- I mean, you did
11 describe him as a warrior.

12 ROMAN: Yeah.

13 DEBRA: But if you think about sort of
14 his characteristics that have really carried his
15 work forward, what would those three characteristics
16 be?

17 ROMAN: Well, I would say that this
18 business of persistence and commitment is probably
19 my first choice for him. It's -- he understood that
20 his life was dedicated to this field and that, you
21 know, seeing the beginning and seeing the end was
22 probably very difficult, whereas somewhere in the
23 middle, but you can move that middle point forward.

24 And I think he saw himself in this flow and
25 persisted at it and would not give up. In fact, did
26 not give up to his last moments.

27 DEBRA: Yes.



1 ROMAN: So he was very active. In fact,
2 he came out of hospital to attend the annual general
3 meeting of the Alliance.

4 DEBRA: Amazing.

5 ROMAN: His wife and daughter wheeled
6 him -- or son, sorry. -- his son, they wheeled him
7 into the annual meeting, and he stepped down and
8 became past president. And, you know, it wasn't
9 long after that that he passed away.

10 So persistence is certainly a feature of his
11 life.

12 I would say this -- I'm going to mention a
13 little more about this business of warrior, because
14 there were times when Michael had to take a position
15 in opposition to others. Perfectly normal when you
16 get to those levels. There's -- there are always
17 challenges from either a bureaucracy or a government
18 agency or someone who doesn't understand, doesn't
19 care to understand.

20 And at that time -- at those times, Michael
21 could be quite firm, was very firm. And he had his
22 battles, but I think those are things that he never
23 took personally. He knew he may have been on one
24 side and someone else on the other. And I witnessed
25 a few of these struggles. He certainly never gave
26 in.

27 But at the same time, he was -- continued to be



1 friends with people he worked with, even though it
2 might have been a very heated exchange. But he
3 didn't carry grudges or personalize. On the
4 contrary, he was the most generous of individuals.

5 I saw this very much to be the case once when
6 he walked in Lviv and he noticed a girl whose eyes
7 were encrusted and so on. And as I understood what
8 he told me later, he diagnosed her as having a
9 particular kind of condition, and it wasn't dealt
10 with because the family simply didn't have the money
11 to send her to a doctor.

12 So he simply pulled out money out of his wallet
13 and had her go for medical treatment with his
14 diagnosis, and sure enough, it made an enormous
15 difference to this young child.

16 So generosity, you know, is a strong
17 characteristic of his.

18 DEBRA: And generous in so many
19 communities. While his passion was the deaf and
20 hard of hearing community, I mean, certainly in the
21 latter stages of life, he fundraised like crazy
22 through his church for, I think --

23 ROMAN: The Caribbean.

24 DEBRA: Yes.

25 ROMAN: He did the wheelchair project in
26 the Caribbean. And he traveled abroad to the
27 Philippines. You know, so he definitely felt a need



1 of people around the world and broadly. And he did
2 as much as one person could possibly do to
3 contribute to some solutions in these various areas.

4 So in terms of the third characteristic, many
5 things, you know, one could say. He was very proud
6 of his family, very committed to young people in
7 general. But he also -- I would say he just had a
8 youthful spirit to him. He loved a good joke. He
9 loved relating to young people. He was just a very
10 unique human being.

11 And I find this is one of the gifts I have
12 received and returned for getting engaged with this
13 whole deal with him is it's something that I have
14 come to understand is community of the deaf is full
15 of such unique people and just -- I don't know --
16 unique personalities and caring people who -- maybe
17 it's because the deaf community takes the time to
18 communicate, actually takes the time to talk, much
19 more than the mainstream society.

20 And so relationships are deeper, and people
21 know more about each other inside the deaf
22 community. I recognize this because it's also
23 true -- not as much, but it's true in, you know, the
24 Ukraine community and other communities. Once
25 you're in one of these communities of commitment,
26 you get to know about other people, and it's truly a
27 human kind of experience. And, you know --



1 DEBRA: I like how you have described it
2 in terms of a community of commitment.

3 ROMAN: Yes, yes.

4 DEBRA: It really is the Ukrainian
5 community, the deaf community.

6 ROMAN: Yes. And so I've come to
7 understand this about communities as a result of
8 these kinds of experiences. Had I not had an
9 opportunity to get involved with the deaf community,
10 I would be poorer for it.

11 And so it's been a remarkable element of my
12 sort of experience and professional development, and
13 I've enjoyed it.

14 DEBRA: We're lucky the two of you met.

15 ROMAN: Yes.

16 DEBRA: The two of you have been a power
17 duo for sure in Ukraine.

18 Is there anything you wish you could have said
19 to Michael that you didn't have a chance to before
20 he left us?

21 ROMAN: Well, as it happened, I did visit
22 him quite often in the hospital, and we talked about
23 some of these things. I think -- you know, I had a
24 chance to express some of these things to him.

25 But I guess I would like his family in
26 particular to appreciate how much he meant to
27 others. He spent a fair amount of time traveling

1 internationally and doing some of these things; and,
2 you know, I guess I'd like his family to know that
3 it was much appreciated by all of us.

4 He's made a very significant development
5 certainly in my life but in Ukraine as a country.
6 You know, what was happening in 2001, 2002 in these
7 summer camps, a few thousand people were affected.
8 But some of these things have now become
9 institutionalized, and they're -- you know, there's
10 well over a hundred thousand people in the deaf
11 community in Ukraine.

12 They have been reading about Michael and his
13 work in the newspapers and their publications at
14 their conferences and so on, and I think that, as I
15 have mentioned before, these are irreversible. Once
16 people have a taste for the freedom to communicate
17 in sign language or freedom in general, they don't
18 give it up easily.

19 And so Michael has made this gift of freedom to
20 the whole Ukrainian society. And wherever I have a
21 chance to talk about it in Canada or in Ukraine, I
22 think people are very attentive and appreciative of
23 the significance of breaking such ground.

24 Because it took a special personality to put
25 aside all of the other work he had. I'm sure there
26 was no shortage of work on his desk, but he put it
27 all aside and just hopped on a plane and jumped into

1 a country that very few of us knew much about at the
2 time. But he did it. And today there are a lot of
3 people that are benefitting from that.

4 DEBRA: That's a great way to end it.
5 Thank you very much.

6 ROMAN: You're very welcome. Thanks for
7 doing this.

8 DEBRA: My pleasure.

9 ROMAN: I appreciate it.

10 DEBRA: I think it's important that we
11 honour Michael in the way that he was a significant
12 person in history, and I don't know that we'll see
13 another one like Michael for a very long time.

14 ROMAN: Absolutely. Well, I'm confident
15 we will see such people, because I recognize them.
16 And as I say, there are many in the deaf community.
17 But it's true that he broke ground on this
18 bridging the isolation that the Soviet society had.
19 That's never to be repeated.

20 But in terms of original things yet to be done,
21 oh, there's lots of work.

22 DEBRA: Thank you, Roman.

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24 **INTERVIEW CONCLUDED**

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Certificate of Transcription

I, Jeffrey Weigl, CSR(A), RMR, CRR, certify that I transcribed the record, which was recorded by a sound-recording machine, to the best of my skill and ability, and the foregoing pages are a complete and accurate transcript of the contents of the record.

Dated at the City of Edmonton, Province of Alberta, this 12th day of June, A.D. 2013.



J. Weigl, CSR(A), RMR, CRR
Official Court Reporter

