

Janice 0:01

Welcome to Restless to Renewed: Women Redefining Midlife and Beyond. Here we share stories and conversations that encourage women to recognize that their lives are still unfolding and that new possibilities may be waiting. Today's episode is proudly brought to you by Snag Bags by Karyn. If you want to refresh your style with a look that is entirely your own, you have to check her out on her Etsy shop. Every single one is a one-of-a-kind handmade bag with a beautiful boho vibe. They're stunning, unique, and the perfect way to express yourself. Our guest today is the incredible force behind Real Deaf Stories, a nonprofit organization that is working to bridge the space between deaf and hearing communities. Professionally, she is Dr. Judi Oliver, a linguist, an ASL educator, and a fierce advocate of deaf education. But she's also a mother who raised five kids, including two who are deaf. Because of that, she brings a mix of expertise and a mother's heart to everything she does. She's a true pioneer, but to me she's a friend and I call her Judi. Today, Judi is here to help us completely reframe how we look at the deaf community, moving away from a medical diagnosis and stepping into a world of vibrant culture, language, and deep connection. Get ready to feel inspired and renewed. Judi, welcome to the show.

Judi 1:41

Hey, Janice. Thanks for having me.

Janice 1:44

I appreciate you being here today. So let's just get started. We'll jump right in. Judi, you began your career as a speech pathologist, audiologist, before transitioning deeply into deaf education and linguistics. What moments in your career completely shifted how you viewed the concept of language and communication?

Judi 2:06

Wow, that's a good question, because I have to think back so many years ago. I had a lot of deaf children on my caseload as a speech pathologist in school systems. So I think just meeting deaf kids and seeing how smart they were, yet how they were not viewed as having potential. That really broke my heart, and that changed me. But also at that same time, I had deaf people that were in my church, and I was not involved in the deaf ministry, but I was always watching. But then when I got enough nerve to go down and talk to deaf people, because I didn't sign very well, hardly at all, then I met deaf people in my church, and they gave me the challenge to learn sign language from a deaf woman who was in our community who had a lot of classes. So I very nervously, sheepishly took one of her classes. And then, oh my goodness, they just accepted me and I took off on that journey.

Janice 3:14

It's so sweet to hear you talk about it that way. You know, that you reached out to this group of people who are their own community and you decided that you wanted to share that community instead of asking them to come into your life- and the way you communicate.

Judi 3:32

Yeah, and I think it was so fascinating because, you know, as I was in speech pathology, and it was more of a rehab, approach that, I was educated under and I saw deaf people as real people with real languages, and I didn't sign well at all, and I was the one that was an outsider. And watching, I just saw they're not missing a thing. They have this beautiful language, these beautiful friendships. They have a life, they have family. It was nothing that I had been taught. So it changed me.

Janice 4:12

So when you had that change in I would say, in both your mind and your heart.

Judi 4:16

Mm-hmm

Speaker 4:18

You decided that you wanted to attend Gallaudet University for a summer ASL immersion experience.

Judi 4:25

Mm-hmm.

Janice 4:25

How did that first-hand immersion in a fully accessible signing environment change you and your understanding of deaf culture?

Judi 4:35

Hmm. Yeah. Well, you know, like I said, I met deaf people at my church, and there were several years while I was working and learning and, being around them, growing my friendships with the deaf people in my church. Not to learn their language, but to be their friend, and it was, such a blessed time for me. And then we moved to another city and I met other deaf people. So it was during that time that my friends that were deaf, they kept challenging me because, you know, "You sign like a hearing person." Well, I certainly didn't want that. I wanted to really understand it because I am a language person. I love languages, the culture and, the history and all of that

goes into a language. So they challenged me, and I did go to Gallaudet and it is like a study abroad program at home. I mean, as soon as you walk into the campus, there's, you know, no speech. And again, speech is the modality. Signing is the modality. It's how the language is expressed. So I was in this world that was different and it was such a good experience for me to be the one that had to struggle and, and work at it and go to class and be on the outside and, it was different. I remember one time I had to go to the library. We had to do this research thing during the time I was there, and I went to the library and again, I'm in this little hearing world, and I went up to the librarian and was like, "Oh, excuse me." Oh, wait, I have to sign everything. So hearing people, we are just, auditory. And that's the modality of our language. So anyway, yes, it changed me a lot. That experience was so good for me. So incredibly, enriching and insightful.

Janice 6:46

I can imagine it because I think about persons who are deaf and they have to adjust their world to the hearing world.

Judi 6:57

Mm-hmm.

Speaker 6:57

And you walked into a situation where you had to adjust your world to their world.

Speaker 2 7:03

Yes.

Janice 7:04

And I think that gives you an opportunity not just to learn the language, but I wouldn't say an empathy thing, but it does bring insight.

Judi 7:16

Insight, yes. But it's just like going to another country. I've been to lots of different countries and it's the same. It's similar because you walk in, you may be dressed differently, you eat different food, you have new experiences, and you realize, wow, my world is not the best world. There's great worlds and groups of people everywhere, great languages everywhere. So it's similar to that.

Janice 7:50

Well, I'm gonna get off point here just a little bit more than from what I was gonna talk to you about next, but I do wanna say this. When you talk about it's not the best, I think about that- Mm-hmm with children, and we're gonna get to this in a little while. We'll talk about parenting a deaf child. But our assumption is that the best case scenario for a child is that they're hearing, that they are a hearing person. Right. And once you went to Gallaudet and realized that the people are having wonderful lives and flourishing, then- I think that, the idea that being a hearing person is the best. It does make life easier for you, I'm sure, because that's how our culture's focused. You know, our language- with TV and the radio and podcasts and so forth.

Judi 8:42

Mm-hmm.

Janice 8:42

But, just to be able to walk into that situation and come out with a better understanding I think is just as important as learning the signing.

Judi 8:52

Absolutely. Absolutely. It all goes together. And, you know, I don't know the data on that, and I always wanna share that part too. There are research studies on different languages or even different accents, and people rating how people talk and what's the best and what's the worst. You know, when it comes to English and sign language, English is just one of many languages. American Sign Language is just one of many sign languages in the world. It's not the only sign language. Um, different countries have different sign languages. But, it's not necessarily the best, but because it's the majority, people think that, the majority rules and, English or spoken language would be better than a sign language. Because not many people know sign language, about 1% of the population.

Janice 9:46

Yeah, and I think that would be like saying that English is better than Italian Correct And that is something you've helped me to understand- Because I never thought of it in those terms before.

Judi 9:58

And- that does happen, too, in schools and all around. When you have children that speak other languages at home, well-meaning people will say, we're not gonna speak your language here. I don't want you to be speaking your language," or they might tell their parents, "Your children need to be speaking English." But there's a lot of rich data on what it means to be bilingual and the positive impact it has on your brain and on all sorts of skills that you come away with when you speak two languages. And even deaf people have to learn two languages. They have sign language, which is their mother tongue, their heart language, as I call it, but they have to learn

English because they have to read and write in the majority. But sign language users are a minority.

Janice 10:42

Beyond your professional work, your family dynamic included, like I said, raising five children three are hearing and two are deaf How did your experience as a mother shape your advocacy versus as an academic?

Judi 11:00

Okay. Well, a lot of people assume that, "Oh, yeah, you have deaf children, so that's why you're doing what you do." But the truth is, I had been working in the deaf community alongside deaf people, way before these deaf children ever came into my life, as a mom. And so I've always been an advocate, but being a parent, made me a fierce advocate. So I kind of transitioned from being an ally and an advocate to more of a protector. You know, and I had a big voice, but that voice was for my children. I refused to compromise, and I really had an intolerance for poor access or, half-hearted inclusion, because accessibility is different than inclusion. "Okay, we have an interpreter for you." Well, but they're not included in everything. They don't have opportunities to be a cheerleader or this or that, and just have to fight for it all the time. You know, one thing, too, that was so difficult for raising deaf kids was that- I just felt like I always had to fight against professionals who saw my children as broken, and I think schools were just so hard to navigate, because schools would say to me, "Well, now we're gonna first put them in these classes and see how well they do. And when they fail, we can give them support where they need." Instead of, "Let's put them in a school situation where they can succeed." But it was always the opposite, and that would just infuriate me how they want them to fail first. And, it really changed my life, my comfortable hearing life, because it limited me. So, like, we went to Disney World. Oh, they're great. They have the best interpreters ever. I love that. But you can only go to certain shows at certain times because that's when the interpreter is. So you can't just go and be free, and, "Oh, let's go here, let's go..." when you want to. Everything revolves around when someone else sets up the interpreting. It's not just the mainstream time. And Christmas Eve services were very, very special to my family. And when we had deaf children, we couldn't go to Christmas Eve services because no one had an interpreter. And people would say, "Oh, well, you know, you could do that." Look, yes, I can, but churches need to provide interpreters, and other places need to provide interpreters when we ask for that. So I think it was hard, and it did change my life. It was all for the better. But not only did I have to teach my children about the world, but I constantly have to teach, about my kids. Now, I, I don't still have to do that, but, you do have to teach the world because they don't know.

Janice 14:03

You know, I want to circle back to the school situation, I think about the emotional toll on any child- who has to fail before they are allowed to succeed. And they know it, and it's like they

have become a pawn or a tool instead of recognizing that they're as much a person as the child next to them.

Judi 14:28

Yes. It is different. You know, I'm not saying that across the board. There are some amazing places that provide for kids, but where we lived and during that time in my life, I had to deal with that.

Janice 14:43

Why don't we talk about Camp Dove then, and how you started Camp Dove.

Judi 14:50

Thank you for asking about that. That's something that I love to this day, Camp Dove. I grew up going to camp. My dad especially was just a fun-loving person, and he loved being director of kids' camps and always making sure I had camp and summer experiences. Well, when we had a deaf child, she made really good friends with a hearing girl at our church, and the hearing child was going to a camp in Georgia. And, they would not let my daughter come. And they're like, "Oh, no, we don't do that." I hear that a lot. She has no special needs. She's in a typical classroom. She has a sign language interpreter. She's a typical kid. She takes ballet. She plays basketball. She rides her bike by herself. I don't understand why you're not letting her come to your camp. And it was just like, "We don't have time for that. We don't have special needs," and I offered, "Hey, I'll share. How to get an interpreter. I'll help you, I can come." And they did not want anything to do with it at that time. So maybe they were just overwhelmed. But that's okay in the long run. I got together with some friends and said, "Hey, this is what's happening. Let's start a camp for deaf kids." And not only I said it, but the whole group. We felt like our children needed a camp. There were deaf moms and dads involved that had deaf children, hearing parents that had deaf children. So deaf and hearing people got together and we started this camp. And, at that time I was involved in a Christian theater company called Visual Effects, and it's a nonprofit that I had started. So we just said, "That can be a part of Visual Effects," and we called it Deaf Outreach through Visual Effects. And we had deaf kids from everywhere that came. We started as a weekend and it grew to a week. We had up to 80 children and we had 50 staff. We had a full medical staff as well. Lots of interpreters and it was a blast. And you know, my daughter grew up there and every summer, and she loved it. And, my hearing daughter, Mary Catherine, grew up there. And now, we moved to Nashville. I had it here for two years, and then I just felt really convinced that my daughter needed to run it with her husband, Jeff. So Mary Catherine and Jeff Wolf now run the camp. They're directing it, and it's a weekend in Nashville at the YMCA camp. So I'm so encouraged to see children still coming. We started it in 1998, a long time ago, and it's a blessing. So I encourage everybody, if you know deaf kids, send them to Camp Dove. It's wonderful.

Janice 17:39

I want to mention, too, that your son-in-law, Jeff, wrote a book about his own deafness.. Later on, we'll give out the information on your website, but you can find Jeff's book there. I've read through it a couple of times, and I learned so much. It's short, it's easy to read, and it's really heartfelt. Yeah. It's not how or why. This is what my experience was. And-

Judi 18:03

Yes

Janice 18:04

I loved it.

Judi 18:05

It's Eyes of Deaf Ears by JJ Wolf.

Janice 18:09

Right. When you were teaching at the University of Georgia, you I hate to use the word fought again, but Sometimes that's what the situation is. You fought for ASL to be accepted for a foreign language credit.

Judi 18:24

Mm-hmm.

Janice 18:25

And you also advocated for the hiring of deaf instructors. What was the institution's response, and where is it now? And also, you might wanna talk about here in Nashville how some of the universities are responding.

Judi 18:42

Okay. Yeah, when I started teaching sign language at UGA, I started by teaching one course, and students wanted more. I never want to take an opportunity that a deaf person should be leading. But I have found out during my lifetime that hearing people have tons of myths, tons of things that are just not right about their beliefs about deaf people, and they're afraid. So they're like, "I don't wanna say something wrong. I don't know how to communicate." And so I have been given many opportunities to step in as just, "Hey, I'm gonna guide you to deaf people, and then you guys take it from there." Just to kind of mediate or navigate that world. So I actually did start that first class, the genesis of that ASL program there on campus. And it was through the

Communication and Sciences Disorders Department in the College of Education at the University of Georgia. And I always said, "Hey, I wanna teach this class, but we need deaf teachers to teach the other classes." It's their language. They can share the nuances of the language. I'm not a native speaker. I didn't acquire the language in that way. They have such lived experiences and personal stories that they can tell. But I want deaf teachers to have opportunities to be employed in jobs commensurate with their skills and their education and not to be discriminated against. So that has been wonderful, there in Georgia because now they have four teachers, they're all deaf. And they have 16 classes, a study abroad program, and they're doing things right. And deaf people are the teachers. I'm glad I can be a part of the founding and planting the seeds, and that's what I do. That's my role. I think it is still hard to show that sign language is, quote unquote, "a real language" and not a code. No, it's a different language. If something's written down, I'm gonna translate it, the written text. If someone's speaking, I'm gonna interpret it. So I think that's really hard. It's still hard today, even on college campuses. Because they don't know. It's somewhat illogical that people will say, "Oh, don't you just translate word for word like it's a code for English and you just drop out the little words?" No, or then they might say, "Oh, but sign language is universal. Everyone around the world speaks the same sign language." That's not even logical, because if sign language were a visual code for English, then it could not possibly be universal, which is an assumption, because people in China or France or Brazil don't even speak English. Do you see what I'm saying?,

Janice 21:55

Yeah, I do. Again, you've helped me to understand this, and I'm learning a second language right now. And the fact that in English, where the noun and the verb and the adjective and the adverb are located typically in the sentences is different- in the other language, and it's starting finally to click with me but It's not the same. Yeah. It's hard to wrap your mind around it.

Judi 22:22

Yeah

Janice 22:22

that, that someone- Yeah can say something differently, and the concept and the meaning can be the same. Right. I guess it's about having been taught to speak in this certain sequence. And, thinking why do they do that?

Judi 22:38

Mm-hmm.

Janice 22:38

Well it's because that's their language.

Judi 22:41

Right. That's the way they do that in their language. Right and signs drop out and signs change as our world changes. And yeah, there's a history, there's an origin story. There's an origin of the language. Where did it come from? And it's naturally evolved, and nobody sat down with a book and paper and wrote out, "Let's sign this for this, and let's sign that for that, It organically evolved. Because people need to communicate. Sign language is a real language. But even on college campuses, people will say, "Oh, what are you teaching?" And I'll say, "American Sign Language." And they'll say, huh." That's super easy. Why are we doing that?" And then students will say, "Hey, I have a language learning problem. So instead of being in a spoken language,, I would like to be in this class and then they come in and they're like, "Wow, this is hard. I never knew what this was. I thought it was pantomiming." And, but my question is if you think it's acting out or gesturing, then why can't you understand it?

Janice 23:45

And you're teaching now.

Judi 23:47

I teach in a university, three days a week. And Lipscomb University is beginning to think about the future of ASL, and I'm excited to be a part of that team. And, for the nonprofit, Real Deaf Stories, we have two Sign Language classes on Tuesdays in Nashville. I teach one, and another person teaches another one.

Janice 24:12

Right. And I'm gonna just say kudos to David Lipscomb University. What was the turning point where you realized that a platform like Real Deaf Stories is needed?

Judi 24:25

Well you know, I should have prefaced this podcast initially, 'cause I always want to preface this, is that I am hearing. I am not deaf, and I am not speaking for deaf people. I am speaking about my story, just my part of being in the deaf world. Every person is different, so I always feel like I have to preface that. But what led me to start this, I've been doing this work for 40 years, and there are changes that are happening. But parents are not getting a broad scope of language. If you don't sign to your children, which is their native heart language, they don't have language from the onset. Deaf children that have parents that are deaf are on the same par with hearing children that have hearing parents. They're not behind. Parents do not have to make a choice because why can't their children be bilingual? So one of my goals is to share with my parents. Your children can do it all, and you don't have to feel like it's high stakes, fork in the road where you have to pick one. Their child is going to grow up and be deaf. My children grew up, they're

deaf adults. They're not going to become hearing. Even with cochlear implants, they're not going to be hearing. Does that make sense?

Janice 26:02

Yes.

Judi 26:03

So, I want parents to know that they don't have to choose. I want them to know the beauty and the power of bilingualism and for their children to have language and that they can communicate with their children. I also want churches to know, I've lived this journey with churches., I am a believer. I'm a Christian. I will always love the church. That's who I am and part of my fiber. But they're doing something terrible by not providing for deaf people. There's no place for deaf people to go to church, and Deaf people don't have choices. I can go to any church, it's a seat for everyone, until my church says, "Well, we don't do that here." So there's not a seat for everyone?

Janice 26:56

That's very revealing. One of the things you said a little bit ago about when you started Real Deaf Stories. I can attest to the fact that you have been extremely sensitive to the- community as far as appropriation. You're not trying to say you are the leader here.

Judi 27:14

Mm. No.

Janice 27:15

The deaf community is, but what you t- have indicated to me and what I've seen you do is lock arms. Oh, yes. You aren't saying "Hey, I'm gonna make your life better," or, "I'm gonna fix this for you." Of course. But you are locking arms with them.

Judi 27:31

Oh my goodness, You know, yes, I respect deaf people. I respect them as the leader, the authority about what it is to be deaf, and it's different for every single deaf person. It's not the same. And I respect them as the authority on their life, and I respect them as to what they need, and it's their language. But I will say, for years I have always been overly sensitive about overstepping my bounds. Well, let me just say from my point, as I wanted to be so kind, I didn't want to overstep and take over some type of leadership role that deaf people needed to step into. In doing that, then I quieted myself, and I didn't celebrate my story and my part in the deaf world with deaf people. And I will say that maybe in the beginning I was like, God is calling me

into this. God's calling me to serve with deaf people." But realistically, I didn't know that God was calling deaf people to change me. They have impacted me in the greatest ways, and made my life better. So, I'm never speaking for deaf people. That is very important to me.

Janice 28:50

One of the things we talk about is that the Deaf community is a language minority rather than just a medical diagnosis-

Judi 28:57

Mm-hmm

Janice 28:59

Why is that important for a parent whose child is deaf? Maybe the diagnosis is at birth or right after birth, and why is it important that they have support and not feel isolated? Expectations are given as limitations. So what might you say to a parent that could be reframed so that the quote diagnosis is not negative?

Judi 29:36

Mm. Mm-hmm.

Janice 29:37

You know, anytime there's a condition that we would call not typical.

Judi 29:43

Yes.

Janice 29:44

Then there's fear.

Judi 29:46

Yeah.

Janice 29:47

And there used to be, I don't think there is as much now, but probably still some shame.

Judi 29:52

Yeah. There have been a lot of stereotypes, myths,, and things that are still present today. One of my deaf friends said "If you lose your hearing, then you're disabled, because you don't know how to navigate the world without auditory cues." But me, he was born deaf into a deaf family, he said, "But I was born deaf. This is normal. I haven't lost a thing." So it's that whole did, did you lose something or is this typical, normal? I thought that was so deep for a teenager to say that. But parents do have grief and, what now? They don't know deaf people. What are they gonna do? And then you have professionals that are saying, "Hey, you gotta choose this or this," when you really don't have to choose. You can do it all. English, sign language. Your children are bilingual. And that's why parents need organizations like Real Deaf Stories. I personally want parents to see their children as a language minority. They're not broken. They don't need to be fixed. Deaf culture has unique traditions, art, history, values, and the language. Parents just need to know that. They need time to grieve, and they need time to figure out, who can I trust and where do I go? And, really meeting deaf people is the way to go, because they see these wonderful people that have wonderful lives and families, so it gives them hope. And you've got to meet deaf adults as a parent.

Janice 31:39

Many years ago I worked with a lady I knew many years ago. She was, deaf, and we did the relay system on the phone at night to talk. But I asked her one day if she was a candidate for the cochlear implant. And she said, "Absolutely, but I don't want it." She said, "I love my life." And- Mm I remember your son-in-law, Jeff, and I talking. Mm-hmm. And he said at night he loved it when he could turn off the world and- Mm-hmm he was enjoying his world. Not having to work so hard to be in the rest of the world and accommodate them. And so- both of those moments were important to me to understand, again, that this person is not broken. It's my understanding that is broken.

Judi 32:28

Very good point. Yes. Like Jeff, has a cochlear implant and loves it. But he said, "Man, I'm so tired of listening and hearing everything. Even, the lights, I can hear them buzzing. I'm so excited to, at the end of the day, get in my car, take off my necktie, and take off my implant."

Janice 32:48

And one of the things that's important about that too is when you said it's not either/or for a child.

Judi 32:55

Yeah.

Janice 32:56

That's wonderful. If they're a candidate for the implant but at the same time realizing that they're okay, and they can learn to sign, they can have the implant with that. It's not either or like you said.

Judi 33:12

Right. Do it all.

Janice 33:14

One of the things too that I've learned is that saying, "Oh, they'll learn to read lips, sounds so wonderful until someone turns their head away

Judi 33:22

Yes. And what my friends have told me, it's very hard. And as a child, you're on the front row of class. You have to always sit in the front, and the teacher's gonna be talking while she's turning her head, writing on the board or doing something. And it's like, I missed that." But yeah, the implant's great. Signing, great. Do it all.

Janice 33:44

On Real Deaf Stories, the word stories pops out. And why do you want to have storytelling as the basis of your organization rather than textbooks or journals.

Judi 33:59

Yeah. Well, I think it was Albert Einstein that said, "Information is not knowledge. The only source of knowledge is experience." So yes, we need the research, we need to get the information by listening to a story, someone's real life experience. That's knowledge. It's like, I read this in a book that this really happens, and now this person is telling me, you learn so much more from lived experience. You have things in your head, but are they in your heart? And that's when it all integrates, when you have the stories. I tell my students all the time in their sign language classes, I'm going to give you information about sign language. I'm going to show you how to do the specific signs, but you're not gonna internalize it until you get out of the classroom, and one student came back and said, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, I hate to say this, but I learned so much more going down, to the coffee shop and signing with people than in the class." And "That is exactly what I want." Does that make sense? Sure. That's one reason why we have that on the website.

Janice 35:16

When I think about it, being a child learning to read, I'm nearly 70. So we had the See Susan Run, Jump, Flip, Jump! back then. But we didn't just learn words, we learned them as a story. And that story made us identify with the words and better understand why you use the word in a situation. And I think about that with Real Deaf Stories too. It's the same thing. A story stays with you. And if I was reading just the words, "Okay, today in class we're gonna have Susan, we're gonna have run, they're all random. Without the story to give you the big picture.

Judi 36:03

And also, Janice, I think the stories break the myths. People believe these things or they've heard things or they see TV shows or however they get their information about what it means to use sign language or maybe to be deaf. So we get all this information and this messaging, but then when you meet the real person Oh, wow, that was easy to communicate with this person. The real people, the real stories, and that's what changes you

Janice 36:38

This is not about deaf people, but I'm gonna go ahead and say something about this. I watched two sisters on YouTube and they were from North Korea and they left the country. I'll just say it that way and they go around the United States, and use their phone to translate.

Judi 36:54

Mm.

Janice 36:54

But it is amazing how when people communicate with them, how thrilled they are that people take the time to translate and type back, and the laughter that's going on even though they don't speak the same language is amazing. And they've commented on it. That, they're accepted.

Judi 37:15

Yeah, that's fun.

Janice 37:16

And somebody's meeting them halfway. Not saying, "Well, you don't speak English so I'm sorry, we can't help you today."

Judi 37:23

Right, right,

Janice 37:24

When you talk about ASL or any other language, let's try to meet people where they are instead of forcing them to meet us where we are.

Judi 37:33

That's a great point, yes.

Speaker 37:36

Okay, one of the things that you are doing is having groups meet together that are hearing and non-hearing in coffee shops. Yeah. So tell me, can we talk about that a little bit, about the experience.

Judi 37:49

Yeah. It's been really great., This is local, it is a live event, it's free. I'm connecting with different businesses, and they've been very supportive. Like Steadfast Coffee in Nashville has been very supportive. Of course they want us to come down, but I know that they have a lot of business and we don't want to interfere with their regular customers. But yeah, we were able to go down there, go to Taziki's, there's other places, and we gather and it's called, No Voice, Just ASL Vibes. I actually set it up for my sign language students to get out of the class and go to a place in the community, be visible, and sign together. So, that's what it is. It's just a meetup. Deaf people have been coming, and hearing people, and it's just relaxing. You have coffee or you eat together, and you sit there and you sign.

Janice 38:48

That's true inclusion. Both groups or communities are coming together- And accepting each other where they are. And trying to step into the other person's world a little. We know that the deaf community has to step into the hearing community probably almost every day of their life.

Judi 39:06

Yes.

Janice 39:07

But there are people who want to go and learn ASL, and want to do it this way, through friendships, through gatherings and so forth, versus sitting- in a classroom. And there's nothing wrong with the classroom. You need that, too. But what better way to learn? And again, I think it's important to understand it's a culture, not just- Something somebody does because they don't have any other way to communicate.

Judi 39:32

You know, I'm so thankful that deaf people in the community have come out, and they're so kind to offer their time. There's plenty of other things they could be doing. But they're there, and of course they're helping, hearing people learn their language, and practicing with them.

Janice 39:50

That is a great learning model. Where do you see Real Deaf Stories in the next three to five years?

Judi 39:57

I would love to have more curated events. Some events where deaf people are telling their stories, a safe space for hearing people to meet deaf people. Hopefully we're gonna do a Nutcracker story time for the holidays in ASL. Uh, I would love to have more summer events, for hearing children to learn ASL, like a kids day camp.

Janice 40:25

It sounds like, in addition to the stories and the academic components, it's actually about interaction. Judi, if someone from out of state or out of the country were interested in hosting some of these types of- gatherings, would it be possible for them to come to the website and learn how to set this type of gathering up and, the simplicity behind it Would you be able to give them some steps to, especially for a hearing person-

Judi 41:06

Yes, absolutely. Just reach out to me. You can reach out to me at realdeafstories@gmail.com and I'll get right back to you and we can talk. But again, as hearing people, we need deaf people involved in everything that we do. It's not just like a hearing person goes out on their own and does these things.

Janice 41:25

I think the thing is that it's non-threatening to anyone, it's just a fun place to be.

Judi 41:30

Yes, absolutely. You know, you never know what's gonna happen from it. Just do something, just step out, do it, and then you'll see what needs to be done. So I highly encourage people to just step out and do it. Start something in your neighborhood. One thing I do want to add about the future of our nonprofit is that we want to see more church events as well, more worship

gatherings in ASL, for families, for hearing families with deaf kids. I want for the future and we are having a Christmas ASL worship in Nashville. So look on the website for more information about that.

Janice 42:15

If a parent, grandparent, or anyone who has a child or knows of a child that is deaf- Is listening right now- You know, it can be overwhelming. And so what is some wisdom that you could provide them and leave them with as we close this podcast?

Judi 42:33

Well, wherever you are, whatever state you are in or place you are in, find resources that your state offers for your children. But just as far as your personal relationship with your child, I would just say that God gave you this child, and you're gonna do everything you can to help this child grow and become all that God wants them to be, and you learn their language, and you communicate with your child. Because through our language, we show somebody that we love them.

Janice 43:07

Well, thank you, Judi for all of this information today, and for the good work you've been doing and will continue to do. Let our listeners know right now how they can reach out to you again when we're gonna repeat this, and learn more about your offerings. You're available for speaking engagements, and much more. So go ahead again and remind us about how people can reach you and learn more information.

Judi 43:33

Thank you for having me. And yes, you can check the website realdeafstories.org. You can email me at [realdeaf, D-E-A-F, realdeafstories@gmail.com](mailto:realdeaf_D-E-A-F_realdeafstories@gmail.com).

Janice 43:52

Okay. Once again, I'm gonna remind you that we've been speaking with Dr. Judi Oliver today. If you enjoyed this podcast and you'd like to hear more podcasts or learn more about Restless to Renewed, you can find more information at restlessterrenewed.com. We hope you'll continue to listen. And for now we're just gonna say goodbye. Bye. Thanks for having me