

CANADIAN JOURNAL OF

Disability Studies

Published by the Canadian Disability Studies Association · Association Canadienne des Études sur l'Incapacité

Canadian Journal of Disability Studies

**Published by the Canadian Disability Studies Association
Association Canadienne des Études sur le Handicap**

Hosted by The University of Waterloo

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Richard Medugno. (2020). *Deaf Politician: The Gary Malkowski Story*. Bolton, ON: ISBN: 9781499540482

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Deaf Politician: The Gary Malkowski Story is a self-published biography by Richard Medugno, who is also the author of *Deaf Daughter, Hearing Father* (Medugno, 2005), a published memoir about being the parent of a deaf child. It was this lived experience that led Medugno to first encounter Malkowski in 1993, midway through the latter's term as the first and only signing deaf Member of Provincial Parliament in Canada. As the author writes in a note at the beginning of the book, the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent loss of employment led him to revisit and publish his book manuscript, thirty years after Malkowski's election victory.

Full disclosure: I am a colleague of Gary Malkowski, whom I met approximately twenty-three years ago when as a young adult, I began learning American Sign Language (ASL) and participating in deaf communities. As such, my entrance into deaf communities was different from Malkowski's, who grew up attending first a private preschool for deaf children in Hamilton, Ontario, then the Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf in Milton, and finally Gallaudet University in Washington, DC. However, we share a common interest in bilingual education for deaf children where a natural sign language is a language of instruction, and neither of us experienced this form of education as children (since for most of the twentieth century, deaf schools in Ontario followed an oralist and later a signed English philosophy). Malkowski's greatest accomplishments include overcoming an early childhood, primary, and secondary education that was centered on speech production and perception skills, winning a provincial

election, and surviving thirty-five years at the Canadian Hearing Society (now Canadian Hearing Services, or CHS), which terminated him unceremoniously in December 2019. He was also instrumental in shepherding Bill 4 of the Ontario Education Act into law, where in 1993 Ontario recognized ASL and Langue des signes québécoise as languages of instruction in education for deaf learners. In 1994, he introduced the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act as a private member's bill.

Medugno's book is organized into fourteen chapters with a prologue and epilogue. The first ten chapters summarize Malkowski's early life and formational experiences that led to his completion of undergraduate and Master's degrees at Gallaudet, return to Canada and initiation into politics through the historical Deaf Ontario Now movement. This movement was spearheaded by the Ontario Association of the Deaf's Education Task Force. The Education Task Force, which also featured such renowned deaf leaders as Patty Shores-Hermann and Norma-Jean Taylor, was galvanized by the 1985 passage of Bill 82 of the Ontario Education Act mandating the integration of disabled students in regular schools without provision for sign language for deaf children or consultation with deaf communities. The participants in Deaf Ontario Now seized widespread media attention, held rallies across the province, staged sit-ins in the offices of the Minister of Education and the Premier, and triggered educational reform. This movement also led to Malkowski's fateful introduction by former New Democratic Party candidate Judy Rebick, who then worked at the CHS, to NDP education critic Richard Johnston. On the eve of his planned retirement from politics, as Johnston stated, "I needed a cause" (p. 81). Johnston introduced a private member's bill calling for a review of deaf education, which passed unanimously, and later supported Malkowski's bid for election. The last four chapters of the book describe Malkowski's 1990 election victory and time in office as an MPP under Bob

Rae's NDP government. The epilogue crams in the passage of Bill 4, the introduction of the AODA, and the loss of Malkowski's seat in 1995 with the Mike Harris sweep that returned a Conservative government to power.

Because the book is self-published, it has certain limitations, including the need for editing and updating of information and the addition of an index. For instance, Milton, Ontario no longer has merely "30,000 inhabitants" (p. 22). Due to changes in leadership over the past five years, the CHS is no longer an organization where, thanks to Malkowski's influence, "a hearing person would have to be fluent in ASL to impress" (p. 85). Malkowski's own life has stretched and continued beyond his early political career, and a true biography would not stop where the book does. The book is also limited due to its reliance on the perspectives of mostly nondeaf people and on deaf people (including Malkowski himself) communicating only in English, and on English-language texts, quotations, and interviews. Not interviewing deaf people in ASL for a biography of a deaf person whose primary language is ASL deprives the book of critical insights and information.

At times, the book takes a diagnostic perspective toward its subject, with the recounting of results from audiograms and report cards. We learn the etiology of Malkowski's deafness, his average academic performance when taught only in English, as he was throughout elementary and high school, and his initial placement in the "non-academic stream" (p. 27) at Ernest C. Drury. As I read through the first few chapters of the book, I was fearful that it would be a supercrip narrative of overcoming disability. Throughout Malkowski's life, he has been criticized by nondeaf and deaf people alike regarding his perceived deficiencies in English. For instance, the late Yerker Andersson, an emeritus professor at Gallaudet and past president of the World Federation of the Deaf, is quoted as saying of the adult Malkowski running for election, "I

was shocked because his English was not good enough” (p. 117). I have puzzled over this concern since Malkowski is not lacking in literacy skills. On the contrary, he has long been known for making effective use of the advocacy letter. He delivered the first speech in the Ontario legislature for Bob Rae’s new government. Perhaps this preoccupation with “good enough” English is a classic response to an upstart not knowing their place, or a reaction to being reminded of how, unlike Malkowski, we have been hemmed in by our fears.

Upon winning the NDP nomination for York East in 1990, the man without fear did not wait for a campaign officer or sign language interpreters to be arranged before announcing himself to his constituents. Instead, he donned a sandwich board to promote himself to residents of his riding (although, as his campaign manager later clarified after she was hired, “[t]hey were just two small lawn signs tied together with twine” (p. 123)). He overcame cavils by conservative media and politicians about the cost of supporting access for a deaf MPP. This resulted in amendments to regulations governing election expenses for disabled candidates and the passing of legislation to permit sign language interpreters and guide dogs on the floor of the House, thus enhancing democratic government and participation in Ontario.

Malkowski bore the slings and arrows of both an inflammatory 1991 W5 television profile that skewered him for an assumed opposition to cochlear implants, and a hand-wringing 1994 *Toronto Sun* article about the cost of interpreters. However, according to Medugno’s account, Malkowski acquitted himself admirably as an MPP. His accomplishments included securing \$2.5 million from the province for the Brickworks Regeneration Project and supporting the passage of employment equity legislation. In the role of MPP, however, he was unable to meet the expectations of some deaf community members who “believed now that Malkowski

was an ‘insider’ he could make things happen overnight” (p. 134) and bring about greater equity for deaf people.

The book is useful mainly for its nuggets of detail and anecdotes surrounding the Rae government and Malkowski’s early life. I wish that I had access to it when I was writing my own history of Deaf Ontario Now and sign language policy in Ontario teacher education (Snoddon, 2020). I enjoyed reading quotations from people I know, and the detail provided about such matters as Malkowski’s team of interpreters. By self-publishing this book, Medugno has made parts of the Gary Malkowski story more available to the deaf community and others who may be interested in the crowning achievements of twentieth-century deaf community advocacy.

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