



Interviewee: **Lily Giancola**

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Interviewers: **Athena Aardweg & Tony Buba**

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Lily Giancola

Athena: Just kinda say where you were born, your family, or if you're not from Pittsburgh, you know how you got yourself here and just kinda...we'll go from there.

Lily: Ok. I was born—

Athena: Oh, say your name, first. That way we know for sure.

Lily: My name is Lily Giancola. I was born June twenty, 1982, in Newcastle Pennsylvania. I'm the only person in my entire family to be born deaf. I received a cochlear implant in my left ear at the age of 6. I was the first in the state of Pennsylvania to receive a cochlear implant.

Athena: Are you—oh no, that's ok. Are you an only child?

Lily: No, I have two brothers. They're the youngsters. I'm the older sister.

Athena: Ok...and...um, you were born deaf in both ears?

Lily: I was born deaf in both ears. Bilateral (intra- ?) neutral hearing loss.

Athena: And so, at six, you said?

Lily: Mm.

Athena: At six you had cochlear—

Lily: (Intra- ?) nuclear hearing loss. The doctor just didn't know what was wrong with me. They just confirmed...I know...they don't know what the cause is of my damage.

Athena: And then at the age of six, you had a cochlear implant?

Lily: The first child in the state of Pennsylvania to receive.

Athena: Is that young...?

Tony: You were the first child in the whole state of Pennsylvania?

Lily: First child in Pennsylvania, yes.

Athena: I'm still going back to this age. Isn't that early, or are cochlear implants done that early?

Lily: In the 1980's, cochlear implants were invented. And in 1986, my parents were trying to find a way for me to be able to speak and to be able to hear. My entire family is hearing, so yeah, they wanted to find a way to be able to communicate with me. So they found information from another family that they referred to them. That there's an option of a cochlear implant. So,

that's how we drove to Memphis, Tennessee. Not in Pennsylvania, but in Tennessee, just to find a doctor who operated on cochlear implants. Pittsburgh could not operate on young children. They were allowed to operate on adults. So, we drove down to Memphis, Tennessee, to have the operation. So I was the first child in the state of Pennsylvania.

Athena: Ah... And so, your family, did you guys use Sign Language until you were six, or how did you communicate?

Lily: Um, well, I grew up in an old environment. I was only...talk to them. There was no Sign Language. I never needed Sign Language until I approached high school, when I was a freshman, when there was a hearing support room, that they had a Sign Language. I never knew Sign Language. So, from the time I was born, to when I went to mainstream, in the public high school, that was a time period that I didn't know Sign Language.

Athena: So, how did you communicate with your family before you got the implant?

Lily: I just remembered...part of it was, it was a bunch of (...). I know it's the (...) and the (...) that I could not talk with them, but I remember that I had two hearing aids, and I could not understand why. And I remember I threw them down, and threw them away, because I wanted to be like everybody else. Yeah, it was funny, but I didn't know I was going through a tough time. Behavior problems. Temper tantrums. I know my mom had a hard time with me, but she was trying to get me to be able to communicate, but I do remember one morning I was in the garage, and one of my brothers was outside, and my mom was calling my name. I didn't hear anything, and my brother (...) he had to get my attention, and he grabbed my arm, and he said "Lilly! Mom's calling you! You need to go." And he shook me really hard. I could not understand what was going on. So I ran around the house, went up to my mom, attention, and she could she was frustrated and not happy. Knowing that I couldn't hear. But she was always very brave, to push me to be where I am now.

Athena: That's so interesting. I can't imagine how frustrated you were to not be able to communicate.

Lily: Yeah. Especially with the case that I'm working with the preschool, all of the kids have the same problems that reminds me of how I was, a long time ago, in my childhood. It was just the same problems. And now I am beginning to understand why the kids have behavior problems. Why the kids throw out their temper. It is because some of them can't talk. But you can tell that they are trying to say it out loud, but they can't tell you how they're feeling. That they used to be able, and temper instead of words.

Athena: So, you went to Tennessee, and had the implant. Did your whole family go?

Lily: Um, I would say, almost every year, it was just me and my parents go down here for audiologist, because they had an audiologist, down here who could look with me because, at the

same time, people would try to set up a program, and they were trying to learn how to set up the cochlear implant. So, most of the time, my grandparents took me there because both of my parents were trying to look to pay to cover the cost of everything.

Athena: How much does a cochlear implant, now, cost? Do you know?

Lily: Um, I would say about the same as a long time ago, but I can't tell you for sure, but I do know back then in my time, it cost us about \$60,000 just to cover with the operation, with the surgery.

Athena. Six or sixty?

Lily: \$60,000. The cochlear implants, everything.

Athena: So what was that like, then, after you had the implants? After it healed and you could hear?

Lily: You mean when I used the cochlear implants?

Athena: Right, after.

Lily: I remember the first time when I heard a sound was in the audiologist room to see if they could set up a program to see if I could hear the high pitch, the low pitch. The very first day it was a high pitch. And it was...so...really bad. I could remember myself sitting there wondering "What am I doing?" Because there was a board in front of me with different pictures, and there was a thread, and a button that you could move if it was loud, medium, soft. And I was just staring at it for a while until she turned it up, and it was really loud, and I screamed, and I cried, and I threw my hearing aids, threw them across the table. That was the first sound I heard. But after a couple hours of my grandparents, my mom tried to encourage me to put it on. They were trying to calm me down because I was afraid I would hear another same loud sound. But after that, it just became smooth, and I just went along with it. And there were a lot of rewards. What do you call that...like if you do this, you can get a toy.

Athena: Ok, kind of like a rewards system, or something like that.

Lily: Yeah, something like that. Yeah, because I remember that. If I (...) the cochlear implant, they would tell me they were buying you a Barbie doll. "You did a good job on that."

Tony: Positive reinforcement.

Lily: Yes, yes! Positive reinforcement. That was it. Yeah, if I did good they would give me a Barbie doll. If I did good, they would take me out to McDonalds, or chicken or whatever. Yeah, it was funny.

Athena: And so...uh, you went to a regular school?

Lily: I went to DePaul. The whole school for the deaf. And I went there since I was—

Athena: What age is DePaul? Like, how young can you start at DePaul?

Lily: You mean, now or back then? Because it was different times.

Tony: Back then.

Lily: Because I'm, I'm not sure what is the history of DePaul is... I remember I went to DePaul when I was two and a half, or three years old. You can start now.

Athena: So, pretty early.

Lily: Yeah, right now, you can put in a toddler, around two, sometimes one, if their parents decide to put a child with a cochlear implant at one, and they want to start early intervention program, they're more than welcome.

Athena: And then when you age out of the program, can you graduate, or does it stop at a certain...?

Lily: It depends on what school districts you go to, and it depends on how your parents feeling confident that your child can go mainstream. In my situation, my mom wanted me to stay at DePaul for the whole period of time until I am ready to go to high school. She wasn't worried about the language part, or what I am learning. She was already worried about my speech, because she wanted me to practice using speech. She thought that speech was the most important in my life. That's true, at high school, you need to be able to talk, and when you go to college, you need to have that kind of conversation. She wanted me to stay at (...) for myself, and be able to talk to everybody. So, I thought that she did the right thing, but also at the time, I would have liked to have learned more. But I'm always up for the challenge. (..) that if anybody can do this, I can do this. It doesn't matter how many steps you have to go through. For the hearing people, they go through the first step, but for someone like me, they have to go through a few steps to get to the point of where you wanted to be.

Athena: So, then you stayed how long at DePaul?

Lily: I stayed from 2 ½ years until I was 15. I graduated from DePaul and moved onto mainstream.

Athena: And where did you go then?

Lily: Mt. Lebanon High School of Pittsburgh.

Athena: And how was that transition?

Lily: Um, at the beginning of the year, it was hard because I wanted to be sure I was explaining myself. Because I know that I played soccer all my life with the hearing girls from my

hometown. And I knew there was a lot of communication problems between me, the coach, and the girls. And it was the same transition for me to go to high school. But there were so many people. You could hear them talking, but you don't know what they're talking about, you know. The transition for me was hard, because going into a classroom full of 30 students and a teacher in front of you. Every time that I watched the teacher, they would turn their back, and they would talk facing the board. And that frustrated me the most, and my mom were fighting (...) for me (...) take an interpreter, and something else. I have never approached an interpreter, and or note-taker in my life, because I thought I was (...) taking notes, and it was harder for me, because I can, I am trained to read lips, and when I read lips, I can (...) and write it down. That's how I learn. And when the teacher turned around, I had no idea where it's going. My mom wanted to make sure that I was on top of this. And for the interpreter, I remember the first day of class (...) that the interpreter show up, and she was looking for a girl named Lilly Giancola, and I just sat there. "Um...that's me." I wasn't sure if I was in trouble, or had to report to the office. It was real bad. And she sat there and said "I am the interpreter for you. Do you know Sign Language?" And I shook there in shock. And I told her, "No...I only read lips." And she was like "Oh...so you don't know Sign Language at all?" And I said no. But she said there was another deaf student in the classroom, and I was like "oh." I didn't know anybody yet. I just... There was my first day of school, my first transition. And there was a kid named Wyde. And which (...) that he went to DePaul, and I do remember him, but I did not know that he knew Sign Language more than I do. He came in the class room, and she would interpret for him, but I told her that I'm already here (...) read lips. At the teacher. And she said "well, it would be hard for you but (...)" It was really hard because the Sign Language, I have no idea what was hard about, and as I talk with him, and the friends in high school, and the teacher would try to help me out, that she would teaching me some Signs that made me so I could benefit, to understand the conversation. So I went through that, but I never took Sign Language classes in high school. I would pick it up through friends, and through the interpreter. And that's how I became familiar with that. And I took Sign Language in college, and now I understand more and more. And, to me, it's very useful, because you can understand the pictures, and you can understand what everyone else is trying to say to you. For example, I can't look back now on Sign Language, in case if I didn't catch the word the person said talking to me, because most of the time I read lips, but I do not look down at the Sign Language. But if I didn't catch the part, I would look out. "Ohh, gotcha." You know, that helped me to understand more.

Tony: So, at 15, you're in a new high school. Now, 15 is a difficult age for anybody. Now, friendships have already been made with a lot of these students. Socially, was it difficult?

Lily: At first, it was hard because you had to make a new friendship, and you were leaving the people at school behind. And you also know that you're moving on to a different school, and you have to make new friends. It was hard at first. But then I realized that it's either me making friends with the hearing people, or me making friends with the people who would be with me all the time in the hearing support classroom that I would be seeing them every day. So I have to

balance out if I want to be friends with everybody, I would have to accommodate their needs, because they know Sign Language. I don't. So I had to work it out with them, and it worked just fine. And I became friends with them, and to this, to right now, I'm still best friends with them. It's just that. You need to accommodation to meet their needs, and they accommodation to my needs. It just works really fine. And I played soccer in high school too. Four years. Not with Mt. Lebanon High School, but with my hometown. When I formed the friendship with the girls, (...) I was thrilled. It worked just fine. It's just that everybody knows, when they come to me, they would someone would mention to me, they would tell me what we have to do at practice. It's just, one step behind, I'm just one step behind them. They all know that. They all expect that. 'Cause they know who I am, so once (...) I would know what to do, on the same page as everybody. So it works just fine. But I would have to say the college was a different transition. Because you're leaving high school friends behind—

Athena: Where did you go to college?

Lily: Indiana University of Pennsylvania. But I went through...

Athena: Indiana?

Lily: Yeah.

Athena: Ok.

Lily: I went through three different colleges. The first college was Natural and Technological for the Deaf. NToD. (...) Rochester, New York.

Tony: Rochester.

Lily: Yeah. I went there for one quarter, and it didn't go very well, because there was a deaf culture. I was not familiar with the deaf culture. I was never approached a culture that was (...) from the hearing. And the school was fine, but the challenges there wasn't enough for me, because you could see how each student reading levels, language level were at a different levels than I am, and I was in high level, and I didn't feel enough challenge, so I transferred to a community college near my hometown for two year and a half, three years, and I didn't know what I wanted to major because I love sports, and I loved (...) and I loved kids. Yeah, so, and that's when the most part of challenge comes, once the people were telling me that I cannot do this. That was the hardest part.

Athena: At college?

Lily: Yeah. I could tell you the major, I changed my major so many times, just because of people telling me I can't do this.

Tony: You don't know how many times we've gotten that. Especially from college teachers—

Athena: —in education.

Tony: —in education, yeah. It's disgraceful.

Lily: I know what my first major was. I wanted to be a veterinarian. I loved animals. And we had a lot of animals at home. My mom and I went out to (...). They had a school for veterinarian. And we went to meet that person so we could talk about what kind of service they provided, and how they work to accommodate to my needs. At first, they were not too thrilled with that. And a lady, she showed up, and asked me a question. "How can you understand? And we're going through a surgery. Say, for example, a dog has a surgery. And you in the operation. How can you understand the doctor through the mask?" And I told you, "Well you can develop Sign Language skills." And she said, "Well no, we're not going to accommodate your needs." It just seemed like she didn't have the time for another problem like me coming into the school, and make the school go a little slow, you know what I mean? But, I would, to the point where it's not necessary to include me in everything. And my mom, she, she knew that there was something wrong with this. And I told her, "I would like you to know that I volunteer at the veterinary hospital, and I observe the people, and they were teaching me how to do this, and I fell in love with this, and that is the reasons why I came to this school." And I told her "You know what, I volunteer in the operation room, and do you know what they do? They do not wear a mask. And they were learning Sign Language with me because I would teach it to them, few bits, how can I look at them. They were fine with that. They thought Sign Language was really cool." And the lady, she sat there and said "I'm sorry, but we cannot do that. But if you want to come to this school, you'll have to find a way to figure out."

Athena: And what year was that?

Lily: Oh that was long time ago. That was, that was in 2002, 2003.

Athena: Oh, that's not that that long ago to be told "You can't do this; we're not accommodating you." You know, I just...huh....

Lily: Yeah. So we went home, and I really want that (...) I didn't like how people were telling me that I (...) so I got fed up with that, and I changed my major. And I took, I even told the lady that I took anatomy and pathology, anatomy and pathology one, and I failed, but I took the class again, and I passed with a C. And then I took anatomy and pathology part two, and I passed for the third time with a B. It was so fascinating for me to learn, because it's what I wanted to be, but they would not give me a chance to prove it. So, (...) what else I wanted to be, and I job shadowed my uncle. He's a doctor in Ohio, so I said why not job shadow. Maybe he could help me out. Because he knew that I wanted to look with something (...). So, he took me to his job, and he just sat down telling me what was wrong with his patients, and everything. And I knew something like this is what I wanted to be, so he gave me a lot of medical opportunity, like maybe at Edgeway radiologist, maybe a doctor, physical therapy, occupational therapy. So I thought about it, and he said "Well, if you love sports, and you love medicine,

maybe you could try job shadowing in physical therapy.” And I looked at him, “Yeah, that’s a great idea.” So he called up lot of his people to see if they would let me in, job-shadow them, and they were fine with that. It’s because of all the connection around him that helped me so much. So I went job shadowing, and I said “Yeah, this is what I wanted to be.” And I love it. And then I went through, and they gave me something to do. You know, like, the accomodation of what I need to do, and I just sat there, and the physical therapist was telling me “Oh, this person has (...) in the ligaments in their knees. She tore her (...) playing soccer. Oh, ok. So they were telling me how to accommodate that. And it became really interesting. And I told him “Yeah, this is what I wanted to be.” And he pulled up all the schools in Pennsylvania and in Ohio that could help me out with what the school expects of me. So, I went there and I just thought, maybe I could go to community college, (...) taking all the liberal arts, all the medical classes. And that’s when I went to the community college that has the physical therapy program, and maybe I could start up there, and climb up the ladder. If I’m a physical therapist (...) There comes another challenge, that person at the community college telling me that I cannot do this because of you need to focus, and you need to hear if the patient is hurting or not. But I told the man, “Well, you know I talk, right, I can find my own ways to develop a relationship between me and the patient. It’s not about you telling me that I can’t do this. It’s about me, thinking about what is my problem. What is the problem with the relationship?” Because I can tell the patient “If you’re hurting, please let me know, tap me on the shoulder. You know, tap me, so I know that there’s something’s wrong.” And he didn’t like that idea.

And something just happened that it didn’t work out. Now it’s beginning to frustrate me more. I didn’t want to change anything. I didn’t want to change my major. So I stepped out again. And I looked into the nursing program. Because my aunt, she’s a nurse. And she’s altered the life of my uncle, the doctor. You can see, if I’m more involved in the medical field, it’s because of my mom’s family’s involved. So, I job shadowed my aunt again. I like it, because you can do a lot of things. The bloodwork. I’m not afraid of blood, though. I thought I could do this. So I went back to my old community college, they had a program there. They had a support service an interpreter/note taker. Good again, not a problem. Here comes another challenge was one of the professors from the community college. She was telling me that I should not be in this program. And I told her “Why would you just say to me you should not be in this program?” “Because you’re deaf, and you can’t hear anything.” And I looked at her. “Excuse me. I have a cochlear implant that help me to hear. And I can *talk* to you. And I really don’t like what you’re telling me.” And she became a little bit more frustrating. And she said to me, “You know what, let me give you an example. How would you respond to this situation. Say, if you’re a nurse in a hospital, and a patient is right there, and you walk away from that patient, and the patient was calling your name, and something just happened, and you walk away from the patient, without meeting their needs. If they die, it’s because of you. How would you respond to that?” And I stood there, having her telling me everything all in my face, and I just cried, because I didn’t know what to say back to her, because I wasn’t even ready for what she was blowing the information in my face. So, I went home and I told my mom, “You know what, I’ve had it, I’ve

had it with this school.” And my mom tried to calm me down. And I knew at this point I was trying to stand up for myself, and I’m trying to do this, but I didn’t need my mom’s help, ‘cause she was always there for me, and she always helped me out, because if there was a problem, she would step up and talk to the people. You know, back off. I wanted to be that person; I wanted to do that. ‘Cause I know my mom is watching me but I don’t want her, I want to try this myself. You knew that she was not too happy. And she wanted to call the community college, but that is not appropriate to do that. So I told her, you know what, back off. I need to do this myself. I need to stand up but I tried, and it didn’t work. There were so many people telling me, you can’t do this, you can’t do this. And I didn’t have enough people to just support me to tell them, you know. (...) So I called my uncle, and he wasn’t too happy about that. And he didn’t know what to do, but he knew that that was wrong. ‘Cause he knew that I could do this, and there is a combination of, you know, a stethoscope where you could instead of putting that in your ears, you could put it around your neck, and there’s a vibration that would tell you that there’s a person’s heart. There’s always a combination there. And that’s why I thought they would do that for me. But I was wrong. It’s just those people outside that would not take the time to help you to be successful.

So I changed my major again. And I was up to the point where, you know what, I’ve had it with school. I just wanted to work. And my mom and my dad, they were the ones that kept me going. They wanted me to find something so I could have a career for my life, and for my family and whoever I’m married to. So I took a couple classes. Someone at the community college was hiring for tutoring, tutoring another person for classes. And someone came up to my interpreter, and they were wondering if they knew anybody who knows Sign Language that perhaps could be their tutor. And she told me that, and I thought about it. Why not maybe have a part time job as a tutor, when I go to classes at the same school. Why not? They took me in right away, and they were teaching me on how to become a tutor, and they need somebody that knows Sign Language, because they had Sign Language classes at the community college. Why not me? I know I could maybe help people out. So I sat there working with everybody else. Then a person comes in, then he didn’t know a lot of Sign Language. So I helped out by teaching him Sign Language, and I love it. Every minute. Because I was into it myself. And also I was helping him pass his classes. The third time into his classes, he passed with the help of me. So he told the boss how great job I was with him, and more people came in and out (...) in the summertime in the fall, but I love it. And a lady came up to me and said “Thank you very much for helping me with this; you’re a great teacher and I learned so much from you.” At that point when she’s saying to me, that inspires to me even more. That gave me back my confidence. Gave me the inspiration to do something with them. And I knew when it was time to go home. And I sat in the car, and I called my mom on the cell phone. And I said to mom, “You know what, maybe you’re right. Maybe I should become a teacher.” And she was saying, “See, I told you so, after all these years. And you would not listen to me!” And I said, “I’m sorry mom. Haha. I just wanted you to know that I realized today that I should become a teacher. And she said, “Go for it.”

So, here I go. (...) And my other aunt is a professor over at Penn State University in Ohio. So I thought maybe I should call her and she could give me all the feedbacks and everything. She was really excited for me to be going into the teacher profession. Not in my dad's family, like, not a teacher (...) would become the first person, the first teacher. So I went to my aunt's house, and she gave me all the major and everything. And I started to work with kids and everything, and I love it. And she said maybe you could become a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing. And I didn't think about that. I just thought I could become a teacher of anything. But for the deaf and hard of hearing students, that would be just perfect for me. Because I am deaf. I could share my insights and experience with them, and they could look up to a role model. A teacher that a child would look up to you knowing, oh, you went through, different schools. Maybe I could do that. Maybe I could become anything. So maybe I thought about that. Yeah, that would be great for me. I drove home, and that's how I picked the University of Pennsylvania. That's my third and final college. Yeah, and I met a lot of friendships that I never thought I would have. I would say that college was the best thing for me (...) in high school. 'Cause you know how in high school they were brats, spoiled attitude? That didn't work really well with me. But the IUP was the best for me. And they had a deaf education major there. So, perfect for me. And it was about an hour away from my house. Wasn't too bad at all. So I went there. Worked just fine. But there comes the hardest part. The Praxis, like teacher exams, the Praxis. I passed my writing the first time. They could not believe that a deaf person could pass the writing. Because you would expect to take the writing part over and over until you pass the language. I did it. I passed it real easy. It was because of the foundation I received from DePaul. That's the cause of it, because I knew what to do. And for the reading part. We all know that reading is what everybody with a disability has to overcome. The language part I couldn't pass it, and I would have to say this will be my 8<sup>th</sup> time taking the reading test. But I couldn't pass the math part either. So, Praxis is the part that I couldn't get into deaf education is because of that. So, I was beginning to get frustrated even more, but with the friendships that I have, they were helping me out. They knew that this is my, I decided to become a teacher. We all like work together to improve my reading. Each time I took the test, it did not work. I was beginning to lose my hope, because everything I wanted to be, it didn't work out. And then I just figure "Here you go, another teacher is about to escape from my life." But my friends, they were telling me not to throw this away. They knew this is what I wanted to be. And I changed my major so I could take the same classes as deaf education, so when I passed, I could always change it to deaf education. But it didn't work, because I took the Praxis and it didn't pass it, so I stay with my major and I graduate. I just graduated from IUP last month.

Athena: Congratulations.

Lily: Thank you.

Athena: Well deserved. My goodness.

Lily: Now I'm going to graduate school and I'm still trying to become a teacher.

Tony: Where are you going to graduate school?

Lily: Hm?

Tony: Where are you going to go to graduate school?

Lily: I don't know; I haven't had a thought about it. But I do know that I may go back to IUP again, because I have two professors, they are, I would say, very helpful to me. They knew this is what I wanted to be. They could help me out, they could push me, they might give me a little approach. You know, something like that. So I just thought maybe I could use the professors that know me for the last four years. So, I'm still thinking about it.

Tony: When you were up in Rochester, and you had the implants, and you were with the deaf community, there was a controversy about implants. How do you address that?

Lily: We all know that a cultural (...) between the deaf community and the hearing community because of cochlear implants. But I'm, we are not (...) I knew there would be several other people that had cochlear implants. But I know that they had a group of their own. You know how deaf culture is. They have a group of Sign Language people that knows Sign Language, but they also have another group of people who can talk, knows Sign Language (...) knows people in that group. And there was another group of people with cochlear implants, but they know Sign Language, but could talk both. That kind of group is what set up the community of deaf culture. Because I know I've tried to fit in different kinds of groups, and I'd be rejected so many times. I'm still learning, you know? I mean, there's no right answers, no wrong answers. It's all about the respect of the community, and how they're working together. I'm just in the middle between the hearing world and the deaf world. I'm trying to help bridge the gap between both worlds. But still, I'm not in the deaf culture, and I'm not in the hearing culture. I'm just in the middle boat, and I'm just trying to work. It's very hard. I have been rejected a couple times. It's just, I know, I'm frustrated because I wanted to make friends with them, but it's just because of how they look at me. When they see me. "Do you talk?" I say, "Yeah." "Then you're not part of this. You need to go make other friends."

Tony: I just have one last question. What's the bracelet?

Lily: It's a medic alert. It's for cochlear implants. It's to show the people if I was in a car accident, (...) would respond to the EMT, they could look up the bracelet. And I'm not allowed to have MRI. It's because there's a magnet in my head, that if I go through an MRI, that would take away. So I have to wear this.

Athena: Well. So, what are you most proud of?

Lily: That I finally made it through college. Got my bachelor's degree. That was my proud accomplishment, was that I came as far, as any other (...). It doesn't matter how whole you are,

it just the fact of how much you came far despite the challenges that you went through. That was my proud accomplishment.

Athena: I have a feeling I know this answer, but we'll see. Who's been kind of your support, and where has that come from?

Lily: I would say my mom has been my most, just, support. I mean, she's been there for me. And she's the only person that really understands how I'm feeling, and how I'm being denied a couple times. She was there for me when I was so fed up with everybody, and I remember telling to her "What is wrong with everybody? Why would they not take me? Why would they not accept my share of (...)." You can see that. A mother and a daughter. You can see that in her eyes, that she was about to cry, but didn't want to, 'cause she wanted to show me the strength that she wanted to be that stronger person. But you could see that she was really angry for what people were doing to me. I don't know what to say.... You know I love her, but...she's been my most supporters.

Athena: So, um...how do we work on this? What do we, you know, work on the community to ensure that you're not told that you can't do anything. How do we explain this, or work on changing this so that it doesn't become beyond an obstacle. I'm amazed that you didn't give up. To be told consistently, time and time again. How do you educate or inform; how do you create something that people can really understand what this does. And by you saying, by someone telling you "you can't read, how are you going to do this?" Or not even making simple accommodations. How do we make people understand that you're not saying "I want you to change your entire school system just so I can come." Because obviously that's just impossible to think about.

Lily: I would say that if I approach different schools, as a speaker, I would come up and tell them that the world is never going to be the same, because everybody's different. It doesn't matter if you're white or black. Or if you have a (...). Or if you're blind. It does not matter, because the world will never be the same. You are who you are, and if you want something, you go after it. Do not let anybody tell you that you cannot do this. It doesn't matter because of what other people told I cannot do. You just have to push yourself no matter what. Go for it. Everybody that knows you will be there for you. They will be your support. They are your back. If you ever fall back on, they'll be there for you. They'll be picking you up and guiding you to the right path of what you wanted to be. I would tell them don't listen to what other people tell you. Don't listen to them. It doesn't matter if they're your friends or not. They're not worth it for you. If you have a true friends, they're there for you, and they'll help you. Those people are your true friends. You can call them sisters. You can call them brothers. But still they'll be there for you. They'll help you out. But it's just, don't listen to what other people tell you. That's what I would tell them, so far.

Athena: Is there anything else, in just thinking about, in talking about your life, anything you forgot, or something you want to make sure is on tape.

Lily: It's hard to put it together. Because I have a lot of things that I'm capable of. I know that I'm a strong, really, person that are capable of doing anything that I set my mind to it. I am very determined that all I can do, push myself to anything that somebody else set a bar. You know what I mean? And also I know that I am very proud of myself, because now that (...) and I'm very thankful for my mom for putting me through DePaul just to practice speech, so I'm able to talk to my brothers, to my family, to my friends. And...there's something that I forgot. Sorry. I kind of lost track.

Athena: It's ok. Just take your time and think about it.

Lily: Hm?

Athena: I said take your time. You can think about it.