



June 5, 2008

Hello. I'm Robert Davila, president of Gallaudet University. Welcome to *Bob's Vlog*. It's really nice to be with you here again.

You know that Gallaudet had its commencement program on Friday, May 16. It was a big and exciting event like it is every year. We had 337 young people who graduated and received different degrees, including 11 doctoral degrees in different areas. It was really a historic event because we have never graduated more than just a few doctoral students, and this year we had 11. Nevertheless, 337 young people are now members of the Gallaudet University Alumni Association. They can now move forward with their careers. I'm really excited about that.

That was a very busy and exciting day, but my work was not finished. The next day after graduation, I got on a plane and flew to Europe. This was my second time out of the country since I've become president, and I stayed in Europe almost ten days. I got back last week. The purpose of that trip to Europe was to explore opportunities to strengthen and develop our relationship with other universities, schools and organizations that work with and serve deaf people.

Also, the intent was to exchange ideas and to strengthen Gallaudet's image throughout Europe. That week was really a very busy and full week.

First I flew to Prague, in the Czech Republic, where I met with Dr. Daniela Janakova. She is director of the Arts Language Resource Center at Charles University in Prague. Charles University is a university that has almost 30 deaf students. Dr. Janakova assists students in developing skills in both English and the Czech language – that's because at Charles University all students, both deaf and hearing, must be proficient in both Czech and English. Dr. Janakova is a long-time friend of Gallaudet University. She was a Fulbright scholar here at Gallaudet back in 1999, and she has maintained her connection with Gallaudet ever since. She also has started a program where she brings Czech deaf students to Gallaudet every year. The purpose is to help them learn English, history, deaf culture, and various things while they are here. In fact, right at this very moment, we have a number of Czech students here on campus. They've started their annual program. I will be meeting with them later in the week.

When I was in Prague, some of the students took me for a few hours to tour the city. It's really a beautiful city. I was very impressed with Prague and with the things that I saw. I was able to communicate clearly with the students. They are learning in ASL and they are learning in the Czech language, too. One of the things that I really

enjoyed when I was at Charles University was meeting the president of that university, Dr. Vaclac Hampl. We talked and shared information about our respective universities, and we discussed formalizing a student exchange program between our two universities. It's really hard to believe that Charles University was established in 1348, almost 500 years before Gallaudet was established. In Europe that's really a long time and it's really long here, too.

During the time I was in Prague, I also spoke to the Prague Deaf Club. There were many adults and people from the community there. They came to hear me speak. I was also interviewed by two deaf national publications for articles that will appear in their magazines later.

After I finished my visit in Prague, I flew to London, England where I visited Ms. Mabel Davis, a head teacher. That's equivalent to a superintendent of a school here in America. She is the superintendent of the Heathlands School for the Deaf just outside of London. That school is quite impressive. Ms. Davis is the only deaf superintendent of a school for the deaf in all of England. She is the only one. She led a tour where I visited different classrooms, met with some teachers, and talked with students. I was pleased to see a number of deaf teachers at that school and parent programs also. Parents are active in that school. Many of the things that we do here in our schools are done very well in the Heathlands School. Ms.

Davis and I really share one important issue –she believes, as do I, that students always come first – and she demonstrated that very clearly when we met and talked with students, and in the exchanges that she had with the teachers and students. It is clear that she’s very supportive of students and I was very impressed with the relationship that she and the teachers had with the students.

I also visited a mainstream program which is part of that school, the Heathlands School. While they are a school for the deaf, they also place students in other mainstream settings. I went to visit some of those programs and I was really impressed with the work they are doing there. I congratulate them and wish them continuing success as they move forward. During one of the visits to a classroom, Ms. Davis asked the students what they knew about Gallaudet University and if they wanted to attend Gallaudet University in the future. The students obviously didn’t know enough about Gallaudet University, but I do feel that now we have started to make contacts and, later, the young people will be able to understand and know that there are opportunities for continuing university-level studies in America. Maybe some of those students will want to come here in the future. But, all in all, I had a very informative and enjoyable visit to that school.

The evening after my visit to that school, I went to speak at an open forum that was arranged by the BDA, the British Deaf Association. There I was assisted by a man named Terry Riley, who is deaf and

works for the BBC, a communications corporation. He arranged for people to come to the forum. Actually, that night was a very special night in England because two British soccer teams were competing for the European championship. The whole country stayed home to watch the match on television – it was just like the Super Bowl here in America – but still, almost 100 people showed up for my presentation. It was very good and I explained to them the things that we do here and developments in the education of deaf people in America. My program was intended to be a feature of their week-long celebration of adult education week all over England, so I talked about Gallaudet's work and focus on professional studies and outreach efforts, as well as our mental health programs and how we serve deaf adults through other programs outside of Gallaudet. It was a good meeting, a good turnout, and I received wonderful questions from the audience.

The next day, I had a long interview with the program called, *See Hear*. That program focuses on issues related to deafness and is managed by the BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation. They sat down and interviewed me for quite a while and asked me many questions. That program will be shown all over England in a week or so from now. They were really interested in asking me about the Gallaudet protest, and then I realized that they came here during the protest and did a feature story about that protest for their BBC distribution. So I think they wanted to follow up on that and see where Gallaudet is now, and I was happy to report that things here at

Gallaudet are going well. We have made a lot of progress and things have quieted down and we are busy with our important work of serving students again.

That afternoon, after that event, I got on a train and went south to Bristol, England where I began a really extensive visit with friends of Gallaudet at the Center for Deaf Studies at the University of Bristol – that center is now celebrating its 30th anniversary of its founding – Dr. Jim Kyle, Dr. Paddy Ladd, who you may know served as the Powrie Doctor Chair here at Gallaudet from 1992 to 1993, and Lorna Allsop, director of part of the program. The three of them gave me a lot of time. We sat down and they gave me information about all of the things that are happening within their program. They are doing outstanding work and research in sign language teaching, and in teaching and training interpreters. They offer a lot of information on, and service to, the deaf community throughout England. After that very extensive visit and seeing different parts of the program, I was really impressed with the technology that they have developed and use to help them with their interpreter training program. I think there are many opportunities there for us to exchange and help each other.

I also had a private presentation on Deafhood by Dr. Ladd. He was the first to give me the opportunity to appear on their daily vlog called, *Deafstation*. That is a daily news program that is distributed throughout the deaf community in England. So they asked me to sit down, say hello and say a few words to the audience out there in

England, and I did. Of course I didn't use British Sign Language because I don't have the skills, but I think I know a little bit about international signs and that I think were sufficient to summarize what I was trying to say. It was fun. I also met some of their students, and two of them had a previous Gallaudet background. One student graduated two years ago and lives in Maryland here in the U.S., and is now studying for a master's degree there in that program. Another was a student at Gallaudet for a while a few years ago, so there were two students I met from America who are studying for master's degrees there.

Then, on the last day I was in Bristol, I gave a speech to the Bristol University community. A huge group of people turned out for that. I was introduced by the pro vice chancellor of the university. He is equivalent to maybe a provost in a university here in the U.S. He made the introduction and I spoke for an hour and answered questions for about half an hour. Those were really very good questions. People were curious and wanted to know more information about what is happening. The title of my speech was, "The Education of Deaf People in America: Past, Present and Future," so that generated a lot of interest in the audience. We really had a wonderful time exchanging information and I responded to every question in the best way I could.

Before I left that evening, I spoke again to another club, the Bristol Deaf Club. I talked about things that have changed and the

developments that have impacted on the deaf community all around the world, and especially in America. It was a stimulating and very involved discussion between me and the audience. I really think we are together and have the same understanding of many things. It can be seen that what happens in one country has influence and impact on what happens in another country, too, so it was a wonderful way to end my visit.

The next morning I flew to Rome where I was met by a member of Gallaudet's Board of Associates, Roberto Wirth. He and I have known each other many, many years, and since the time he was a student at Cornell University and I was a student nearby at Syracuse University. He was a really wonderful host. I also had a chance to interact with other people whom I have known in the past and who are doing great and important work on behalf of deaf people in Italy. One of those people is Dr. Elena Radutzky who is director of the Mason Perkins Deafness Fund, a program that focuses on support of deaf blind persons. She is also the coordinator of the Italian Fulbright deaf program that sends students all over the world to continue their education and to make contributions to other countries, and to learn from them also.

Dr. Radutzky and the large staff at the state institute for the deaf in Rome are really engaged in a wide range of services and development of programs and activities which help deaf people. The institute was formerly a school for the deaf for almost 300 years

before mainstreaming decreased their enrollment. At that point, after considering closing, they decided not to close but to continue as a resource center to offer services to deaf people throughout the country. They really are now focusing on a lot of support for deaf children in early intervention programs for young children and also working with deaf adults. They also are developing teaching materials, and providing social and psychological counseling services. They are involved in deaf education and in developing social contacts for deaf adults and so forth. It's a very comprehensive program of various services. I was really impressed with what they do, especially with research into sign language and research into other aspects of the education of deaf people. They are also working very hard on bilingual approaches to communication for deaf children in educational institutions. I was really impressed with the quality of what they do there.

While I was at that institute, I had the opportunity to visit with Joseph Hill who is a Ph.D. candidate here at Gallaudet. He is now interning in the Siena School. That is a liberal arts program under the direction of Dr. Miriam Grottanelli. Joseph has been in that school program for several months collecting data for his dissertation. He will then come back to Gallaudet to work on his dissertation and, hopefully, graduate next year. I was very impressed first with the things he is learning, and secondly with the staff around the center who had wonderful and high praise for his work. I was very pleased that one of our Gallaudet graduates is doing very well overseas.

While I was in Rome, I had the opportunity to speak at a reception for the Roberto Wirth Foundation. That foundation was established in honor of Roberto Wirth and really provides help for many different purposes, especially in providing scholarship support to deaf students who come to study at Gallaudet University every year. Mr. Wirth is very involved in promoting the work of his foundation.

One night before I left to go home again, I had dinner with Roberto Wirth and Dr. Franco Pavoncello, president of the American John Cabot University in Rome. We had an exchange and a talk about what the possibilities were for Gallaudet and his university to collaborate. There seems to be a lot of interest in those possibilities and he was a wonderful host to us that night.

So, you can see that this was really a full and very eventful journey. I am really pleased to see the progress being made in Europe and I can see areas where we can continue to collaborate, share, and support each other. That would be very productive and I think we will benefit from the continuing relationship we have with many schools, programs, and organizations in Europe.

That is my report to you today. I will be back with you again soon. Thank you very much. So long!