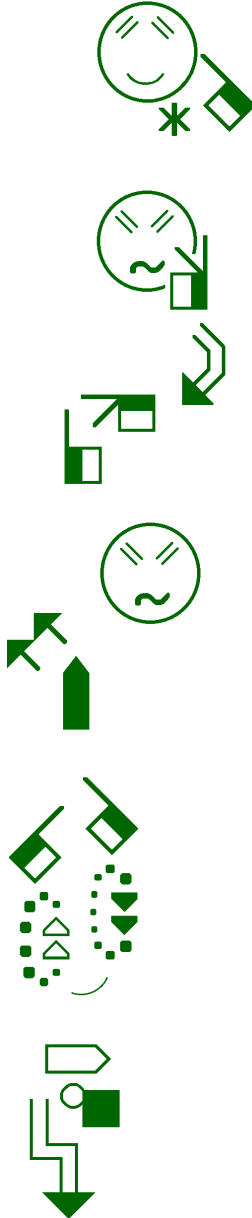


# Deaf Perspectives on SignWriting

Video Series



History of SignWriting  
**2. How SignWriting Changed**



Published by the DAC  
**The Deaf Action Committee For SignWriting**

Sponsored by  
**The Center For Sutton Movement Writing, Inc.,**  
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858-456-0098 • DAC@SignWriting.org • www.SignWriting.org

## **Deaf Perspectives on SignWriting Video Series**

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Center for Sutton Movement Writing, Inc.

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Lucinda O'Grady Batch, Kevin Clark & George 'Butch' Zein

Cover Photos, Right Column, Top to Bottom:  
Denny Voreck, Bernard Bragg &  
Prince Abdul Aziz Al-Obaid of Saudi Arabia

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Kevin Clark, Butch Zein,  
Denny Voreck & Abdul Aziz Al-Obaid  
by Pasch McCombs

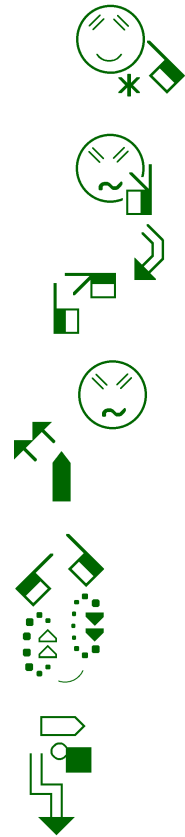
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Voice -Over for Lucinda Batch,  
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Video Production Facility:  
Lightning Corporation, San Diego, California  
On-line Editor: Thomas Kihneman

SignWriting was first invented  
by Valerie Sutton in 1974.

SignWriting could not continue without support from  
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Foundation, the Seuss Foundation, the Legler-  
Benbough Foundation and others.



# Deaf Perspectives on SignWriting

Video Series

History of SignWriting

Video 2:

How SignWriting Changed



On the set with Butch Zein, Valerie Sutton, Lucinda O'Grady Batch & Kevin Clark

featuring...



**George  
'Butch' Zein**



**Valerie Sutton**

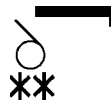


**Lucinda  
O'Grady Batch**



**Kevin Clark**

and...



Denny Voreck



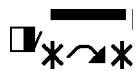
...with  
guest  
appearances  
by...



Bernard Bragg



and...



Abdul  
Aziz Al-Obaid

from  
Saudi Arabia



Hi!  
I'm Butch Zein,  
and this is my name sign:



Hi!  
My name is  
Lucinda O'Grady Batch,  
and this is my name sign:

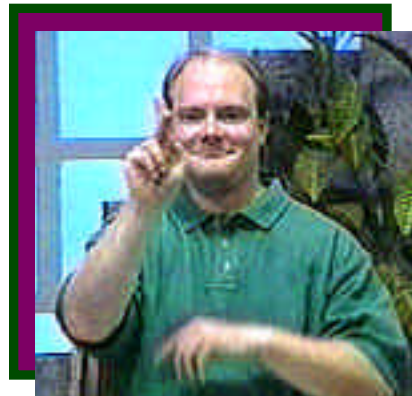


Welcome to the Video Series  
**Deaf Perspectives on SignWriting.**  
To begin, let me introduce you to  
my friends and colleagues...

Hi!  
My name is Valerie Sutton  
and this is my name sign:



Hi!  
I'm Kevin Clark,  
and this is my name sign:





Our purpose for this video presentation is for us to share with you the history of SignWriting...How and when it first began...How it's been used and...Its evolution over the years. Now Valerie, you invented SignWriting back in 1974, right?

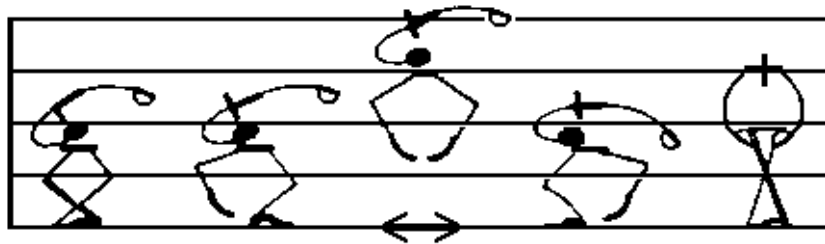
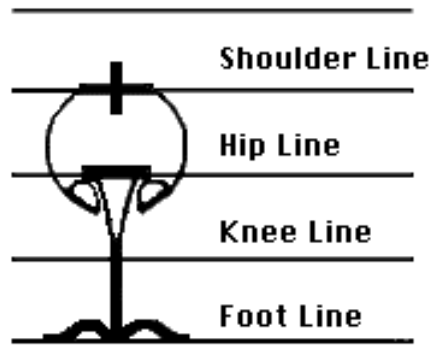


Yes. That' right. I invented SignWriting back in 1974. I developed a way to write dance movement on paper, because I was a dancer, and that "movement writing" system became Sutton Movement Writing. And, we established back in 1974, the Center For Sutton Movement Writing. That organization is a non-profit organization and we collect funds through private grants.

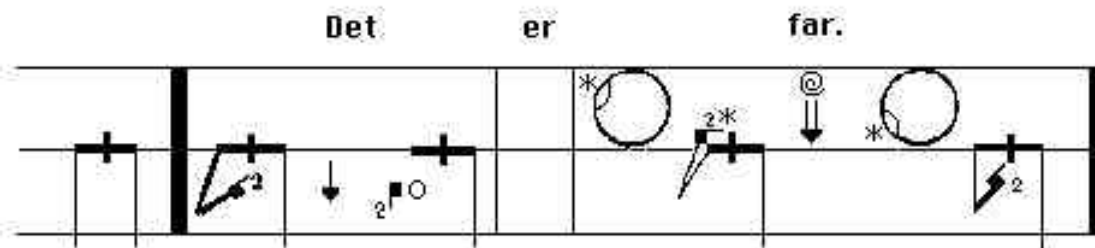
Well, anyway...back in 1974 I was invited to go to Denmark. That country invited me to go because they wanted me to work with the Royal Danish Ballet Company to teach them DanceWriting...how to write their dances on paper. And I received a telephone call from the University there. It was interesting. They wanted a way to write sign language movement on paper and through that work, I developed SignWriting.



**Sutton Movement Writing** is a system for writing body movement. It began with Sutton DanceWriting® in 1974. DanceWriting uses a stick figure drawing on a 5-lined staff:



In 1974, researchers at the University of Copenhagen, in Denmark, asked Valerie Sutton to write the movements of signed languages. This was the beginning of **SignWriting**. Here is how the system looked in 1975:



In 1977, the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD), in Connecticut, was the first group of Deaf adults to learn SignWriting. Here is Deaf actor, Bernard Bragg, from the NTD, with Valerie Sutton presenting SignWriting. This video clip shows how SignWriting looked in 1977.







Pictures captured from the 1986 video "Learn Signing With SignWriting".



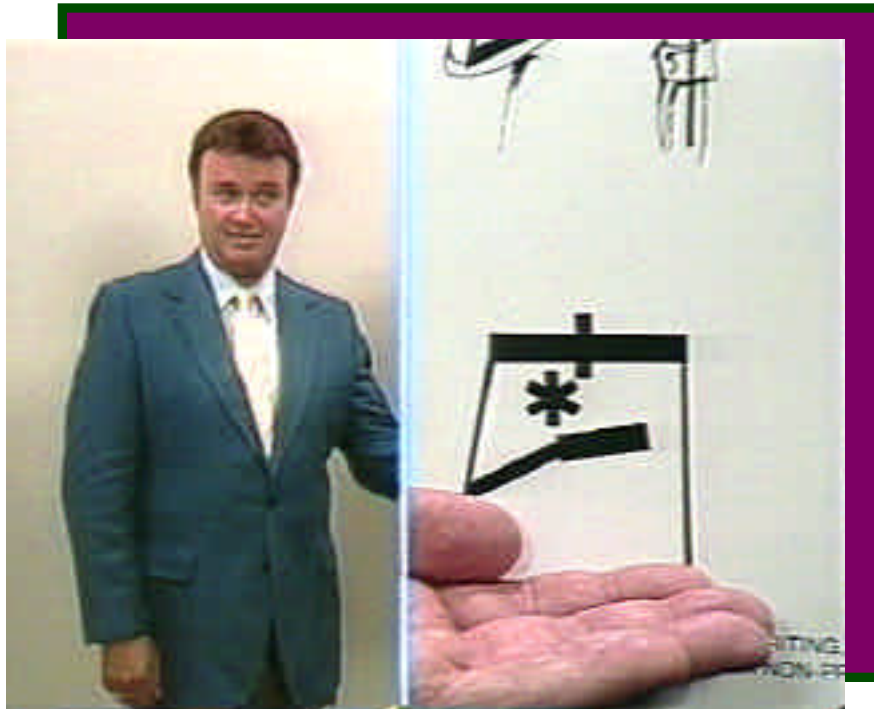
## Bernard Bragg

Looking back, I can remember I became interested in SignWriting while I was working with the National Theater of the Deaf. I was responsible for translating the words into signs for the theatrical performances. I found it very difficult to remember the signs I had translated. I kept forgetting which sign I had picked. Was it with my left hand, or maybe my left arm was up here? Or it was down here? Maybe I used my right hand in this position or whatever. I needed a way to write down on paper the signs.

At first I tried to develop my own system to help me in remembering. But it wasn't until Valerie came out to teach us at the National Theater of the Deaf in Connecticut back in 1978 that I really became inspired. She shared with us the beginnings of her system, and I have been a strong supporter of her system ever since. Especially the part of writing the signs down on paper. Signers need a way to read and write their own language and many hearing people need a way to put the signs down they are learning in the classroom, so they can remember that sign later on when they are studying at home.



Well here, let me show you what SignWriting looks like....



Over here we have this chart and here we have something that maybe looks a little Greek to you. But if you look more closely, you'll be able to see how this picture looks exactly like a person's body.

This line represents the shoulders and going down we have the line that represents the arm and going out to the hand.



And now maybe you're noticing that little star right over here. That means that there is a body contact like this.





## Bernard Bragg

A lot of people have come up to me and said: "How do you sign "hello"? Well, isn't that obvious? You sign "hello"!"



## Valerie Sutton

Hello! Now I will teach you how to read the sign "hello". The facial circle shows the face and we contact with a contact star. That shows the area where you are contacting here. Then you see the hand symbol and the shoulders. Then you see a movement symbol which means "the direction forward". It shows the direction forward.



Back in 1981, I heard from a woman named Nancy Woo, who was involved with SignWriting. She is herself a skilled "signwriter". I felt a little concerned. I wondered if it were really necessary. She and I met and she explained it was a nice way to preserve ASL stories and poetry etc. I felt, well, maybe it was a good idea.

So, I asked her to teach me. I learned and then later, Valerie heard about me and contacted me and asked if I would like to be involved to work as a reporter for her SignWriter Newspaper.



**Lucinda Batch**



I said fine! At first, I was the only one, but later others became involved including Kevin Struxness, Meriam Ina Schroeder, Susan Diamond and others also.

Back then, we were writing everything by hand. We hadn't developed the computer program yet. It was a lot of work, but a lot of fun too!

I would like to show you the history of what it looked like when we were writing by hand. Here it is:

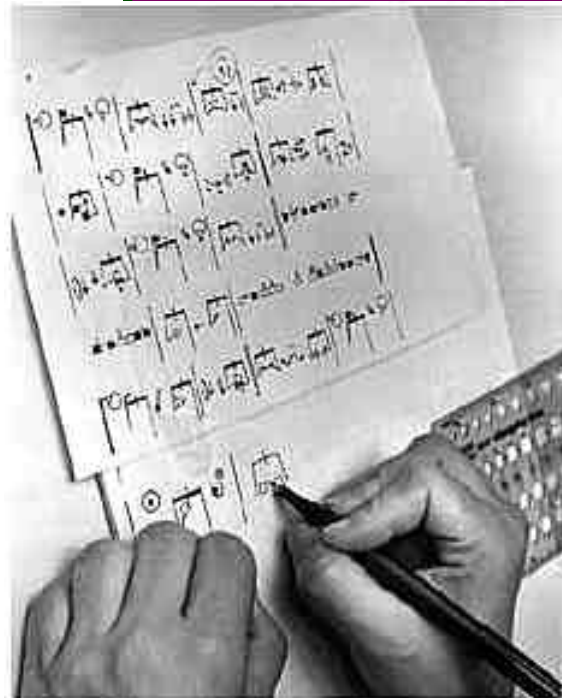
1975-1985

## Writing SignWriting Publications By Hand

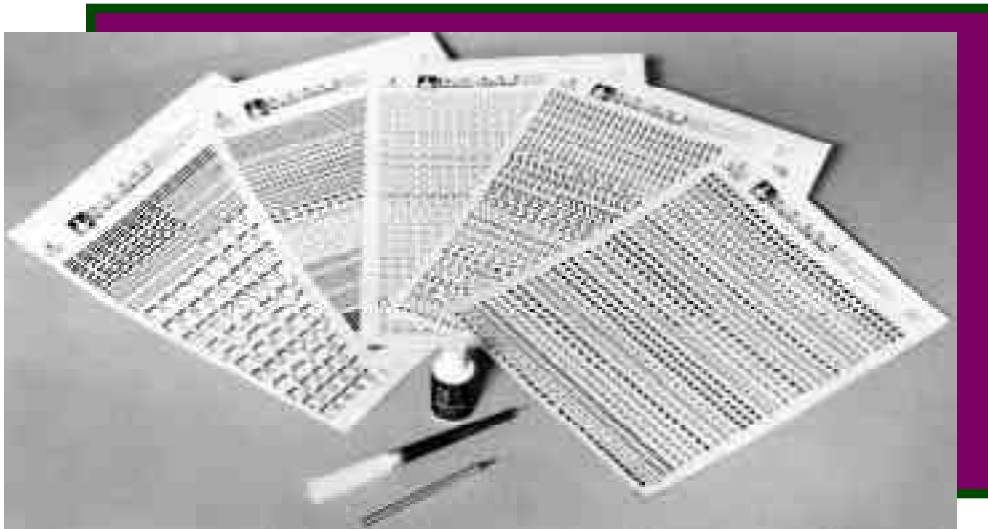
**The SignWriter Newspaper** was published quarterly from 1981 to 1984. It was the first newspaper in history to be written in the movements of signed languages:



At that time, there was no way to type SignWriting. Each issue of the newspaper was written by hand with ink pens...



...or wax symbols were manually pressed on paper with specially-designed transfer sheets



It took three months to write a 20-page issue by hand. The first issue was published in the Fall, 1981. It was written by hand by Founding Editor, Nancy Ellen Woo (now Nancy Romero).



**Nancy  
Romero**



Lucinda Struxness (now Lucinda Batch) was the first Deaf reporter to write articles in American Sign Language. A new profession began, called **Sign Language Journalism**. Lucinda was joined by other newspaper staff members, including Kevin Struxness, Dennis Schemenauer, and illustrator Frank Allen Paul.



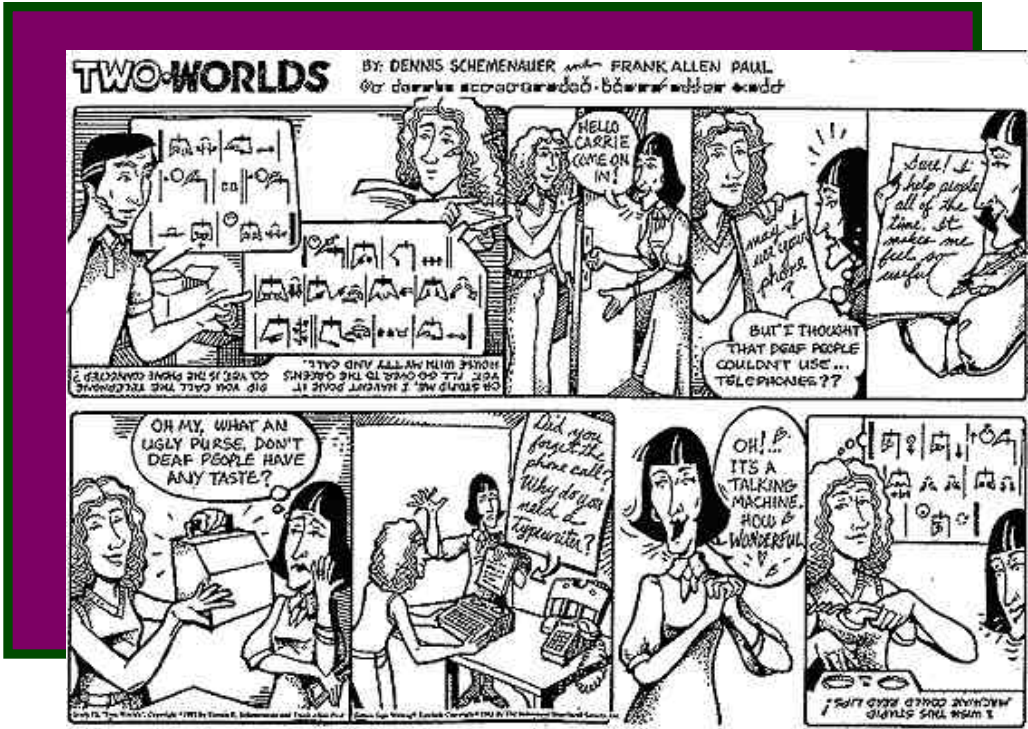
Working with Deaf reporters, Managing Editor Susan Diamond Bucher edited each article in American Sign Language.



Publisher Valerie Sutton, worked with Meriam Ina Schroeder, Assistant Editor, on the newspaper's layout and design.

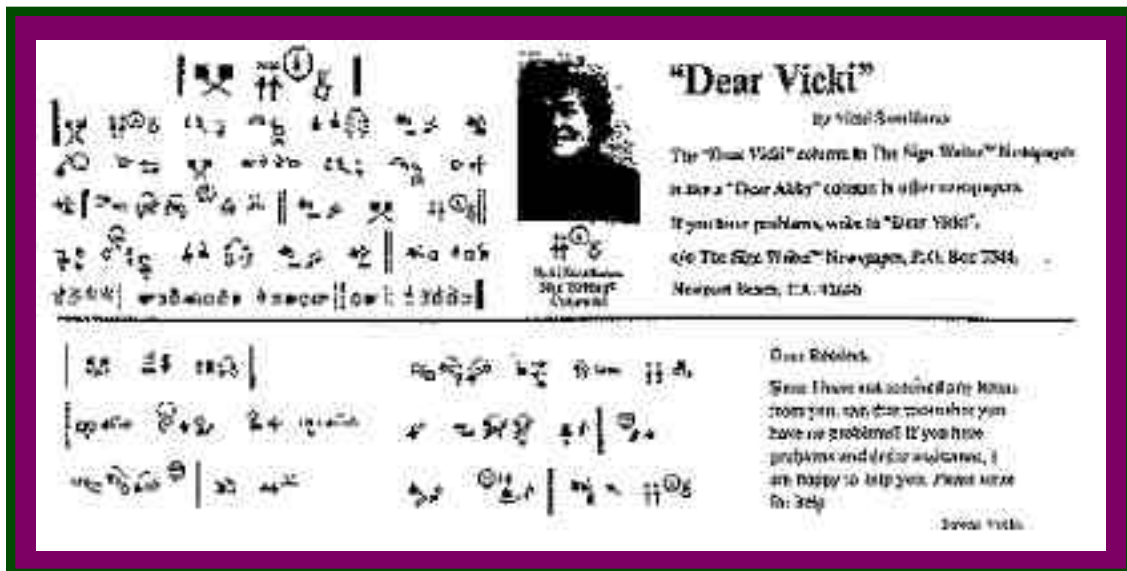


Dennis Schemenauer worked with illustrator Frank Allen Paul on a cartoon strip written in SignWriting.



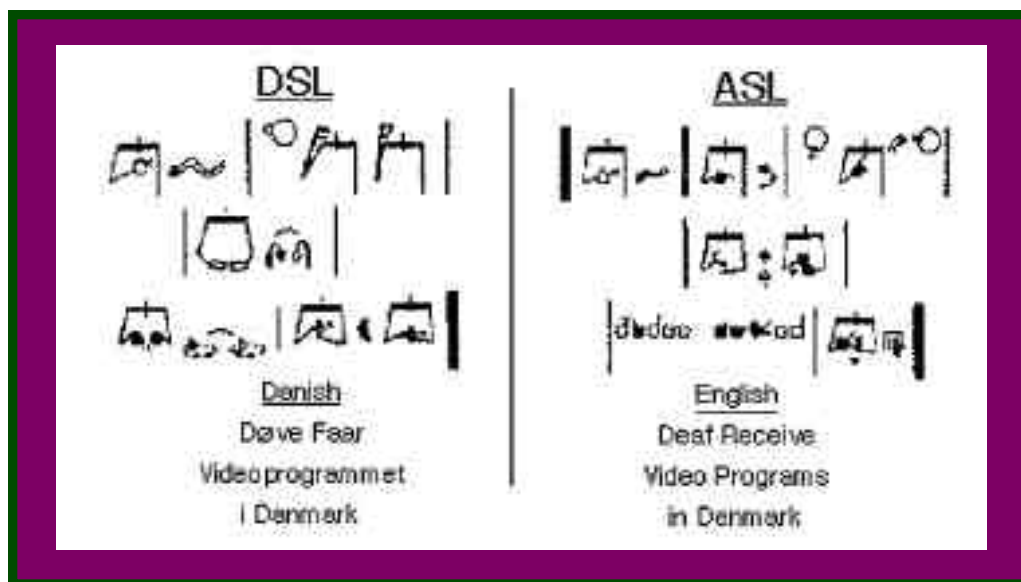


Vicki Santillanes wrote a Dear Vicki Column, answering questions from the Deaf Community.



History was made when articles were written in four languages:

1. Danish Sign Language
2. Danish
3. American Sign Language
4. English

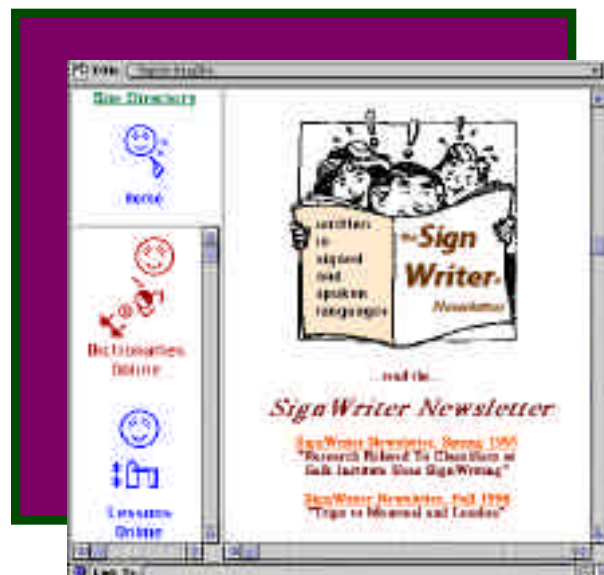


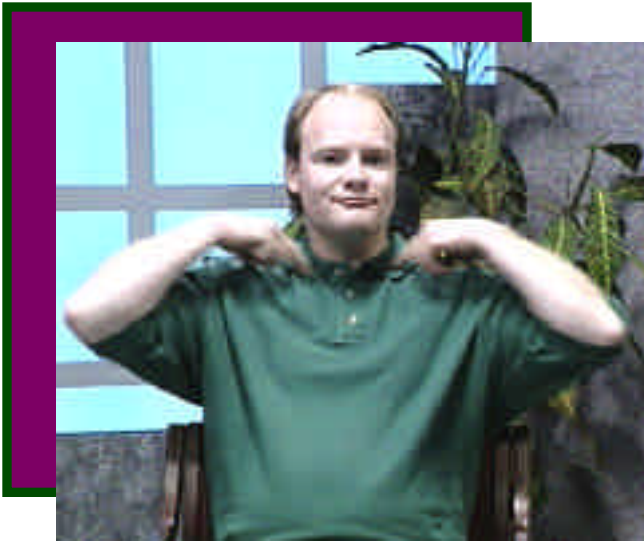
Publications ceased in 1984 because it was too much work to write the whole newspaper by hand. In 1986, just two years later, the SignWriter Computer Program, programmed by Richard Gleaves, changed history. Finally SignWriting could be typed!



Publication was resumed in 1989, as the **SignWriter Newsletter**, typed by computer. Since 1996, the SignWriter Newsletter has been posted on the World Wide Web. You can read the latest issue on the...

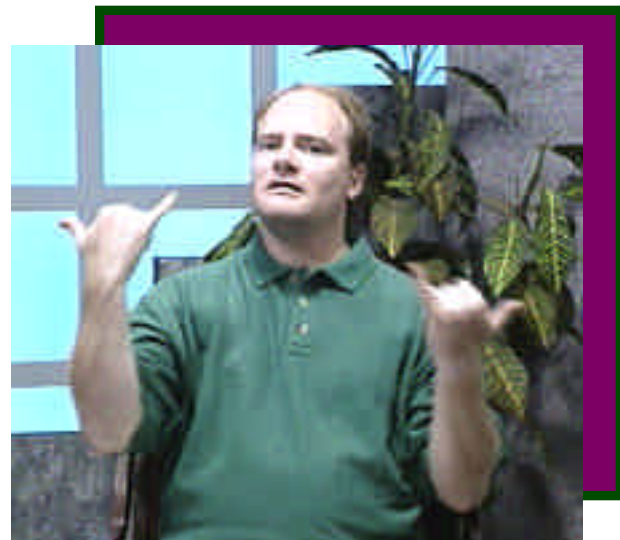
**SignWriting Web Site**  
<http://www.SignWriting.org>.





Kevin Clark

In the beginning, we used **Full-Body SignWriting**. But now, that's no longer being used. So when and how exactly did that change?





## Valerie Sutton

That's correct. Back around 1980 or so, we experimented. You know, SignWriting didn't just happen automatically. No. We had to develop it through experience. Deaf people had to try to write and we experimented. We had three different ways of writing at that time to see which one was good.

First, we had "Full-Body SignWriting", and that system is really for beginners, really, because it is very visual and it shows the whole body...and then we also had an experiment with another writing system, the Handwriting. That threw out the stick figure drawing and we only had the facial expressions and the hand symbols and also the movement symbols. And, you know, that was fascinating. We just felt the Full-Body information wasn't necessary if you knew sign language already. And then we had a third experiment called the Shorthand. And that was fun - not perfect - but we continued to work and work and work. And now I really think that Cindy can explain better how the whole system changed.



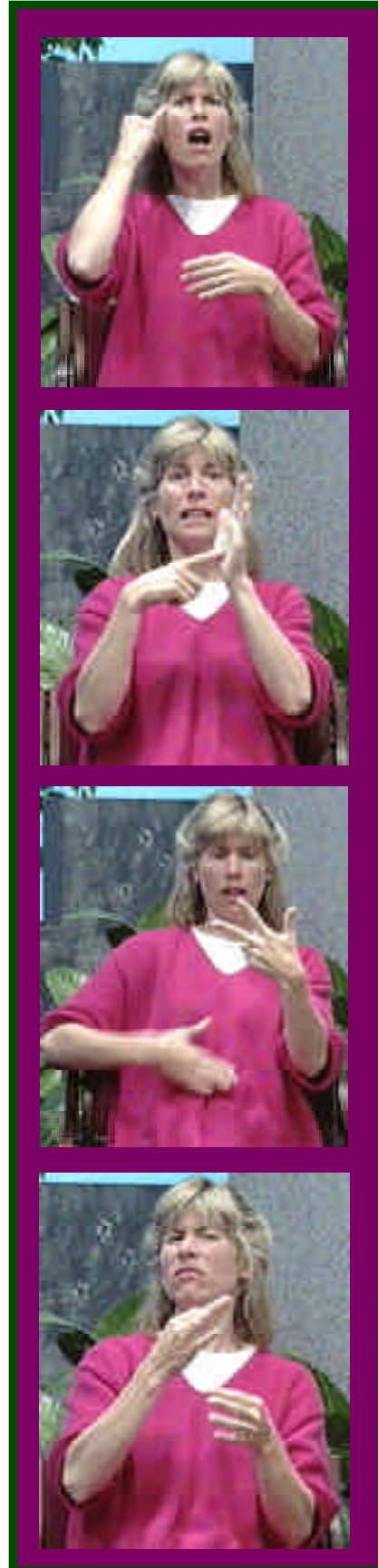
## Lucinda Batch

Back in 1986, Valerie and I established the Deaf Action Committee, or the DAC. There were some Deaf people and some linguists who got involved and we did research on how to improve our system.

For example, before we had the Full-Body writing system. Well, really we had three. There was the Full-Body, there was the Handwriting, and there was the Shorthand. We decided the Full-Body wasn't necessary so we threw that out, and we changed to the Handwriting. And boy, we really improved that system! Then later, our ultimate goal was the Shorthand. Why? Because it seemed it would be smoother and easier to write.

And then we had another experiment called Receptive and Expressive. In the beginning we started with Receptive but we decided it was better to use Expressive. Why? Because we are not just "demonstrating" signs. We are really writing "our" language. So, it was important to use the expressive point of view.

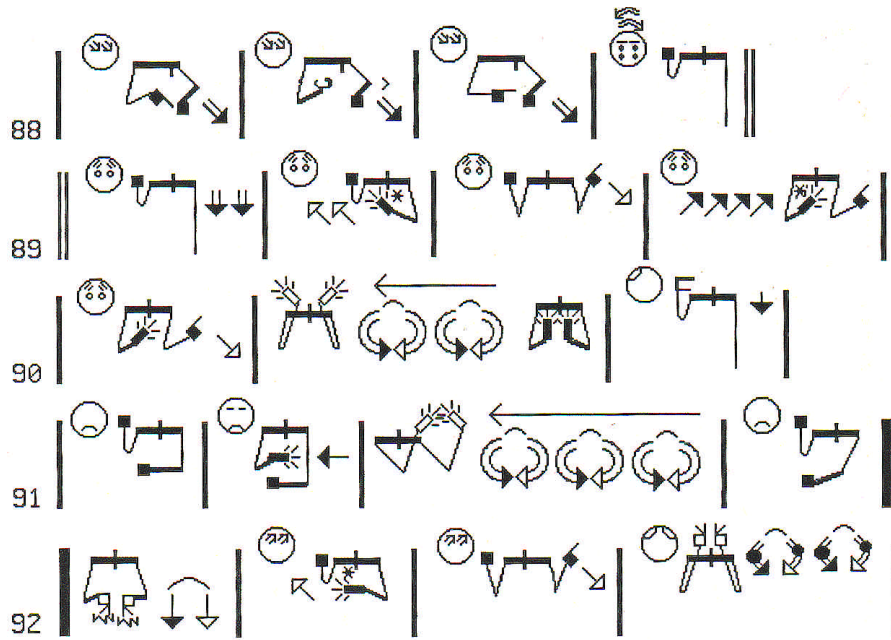
We also started to experiment with writing down the page. You know how English is established reading from left to right? Well, we changed and wrote down the page. Why? Because we felt signs are involved with space and location. It felt more natural for us to write down the page. So, I would like to show you what that looks like...



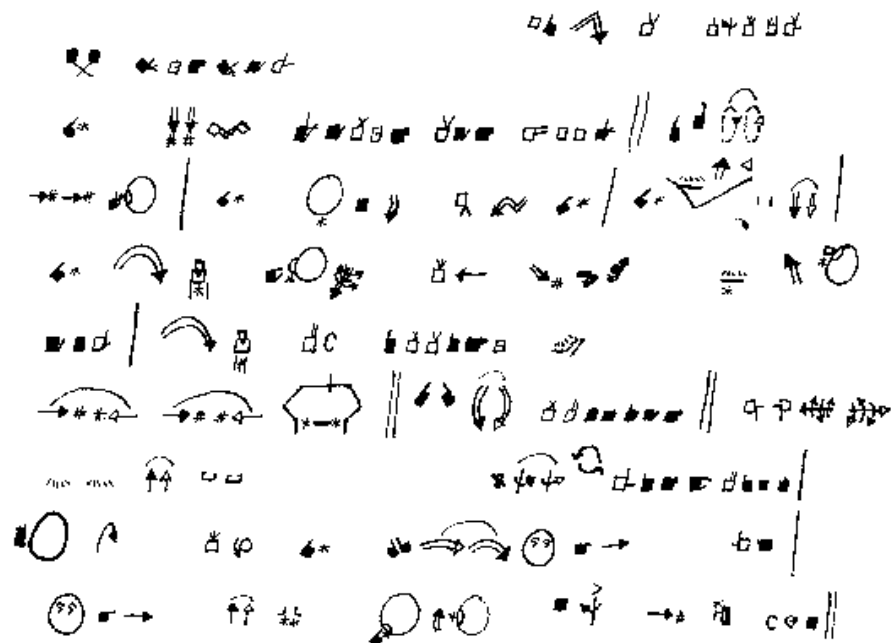
# 1975-1997

## How SignWriting Changed

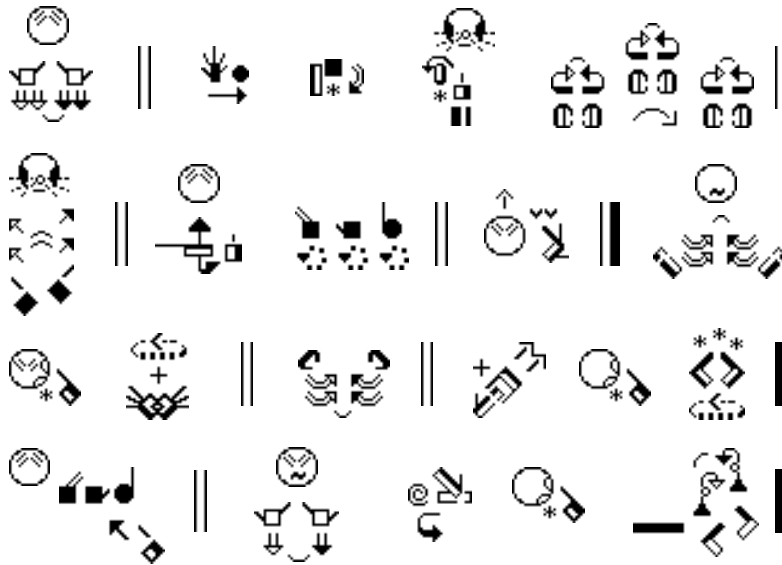
In 1982 there were three ways to write, all written from the Receptive Viewpoint. **Full-Body SignWriting** in 1982, placed stick figure drawings from left to right on the page. The figure "faced" the reader.



**SignWriting Handwriting**, in 1982, started to discard the stick figure...

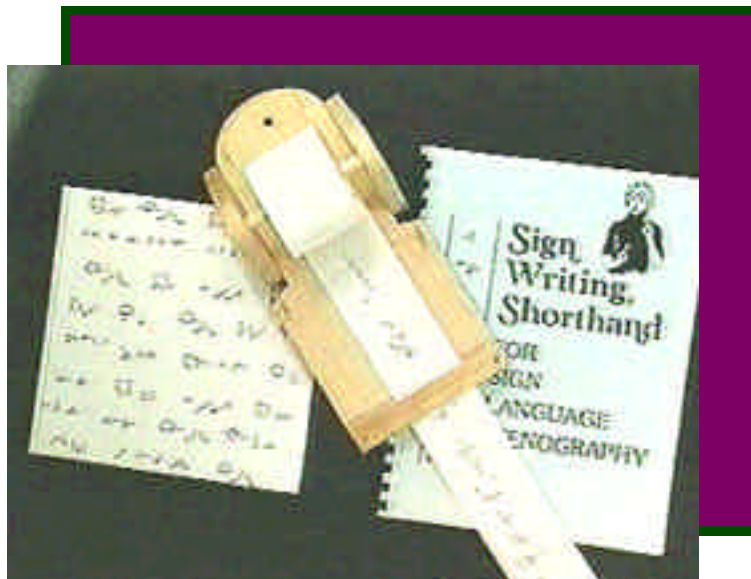


Hand symbols, movement symbols and facial expressions were written from left to right.

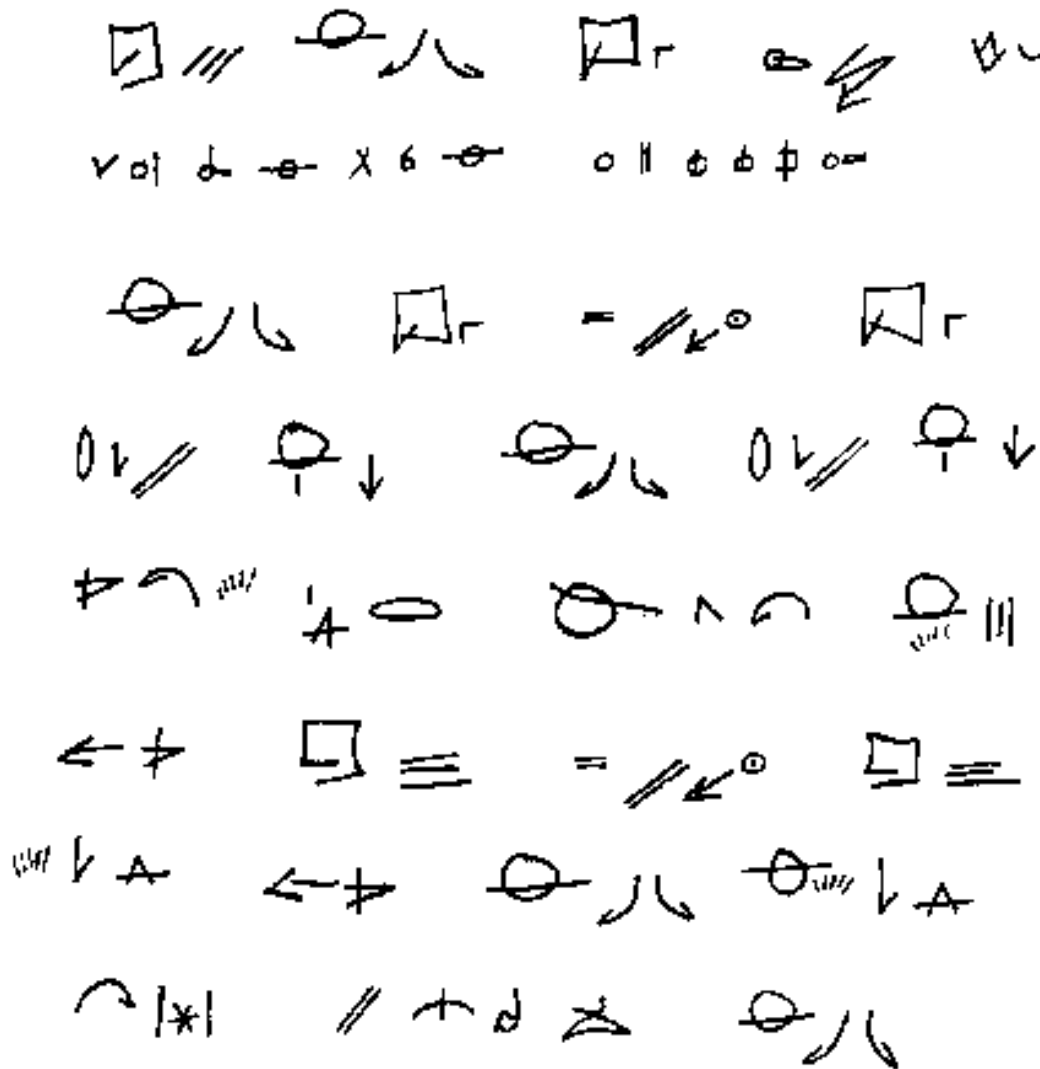


**Translation:**  
Today there are NAD chapters in all 50 states, giving Deaf people many opportunities to become active in the Deaf Community. The NAD is now a part of our Deaf heritage.

**SignWriting Shorthand**, in 1982, was really a stenography system, written on special stenography tables.



The Shorthand was written at the speed of movement and took special training. There were plans to establish a new profession called **Sign Language Stenography**.

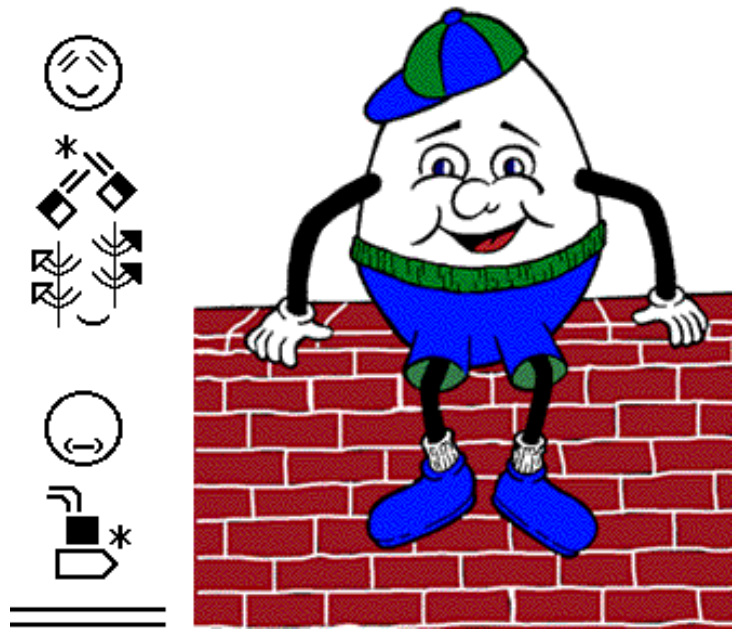


In 1997, Full-Body SignWriting was still being used in Denmark. But changes were made. It is now written from the Expressive Viewpoint.

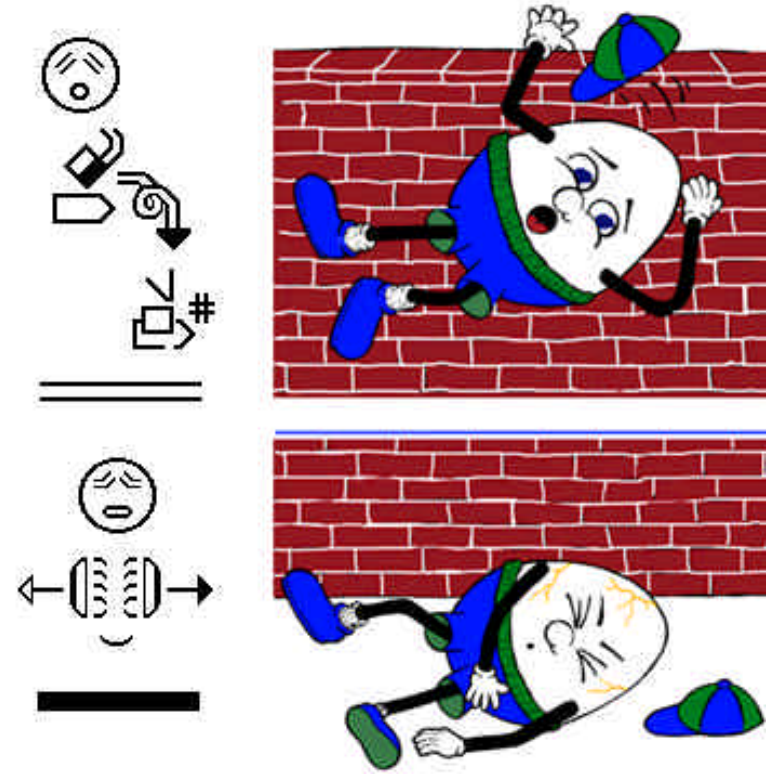




In 1997, **Stacked SignWriting** was in use in 14 countries. It began in 1986. Deaf people naturally "stack" symbols in relationship to the center of the body. The facial expressions are on the top with the hands underneath.



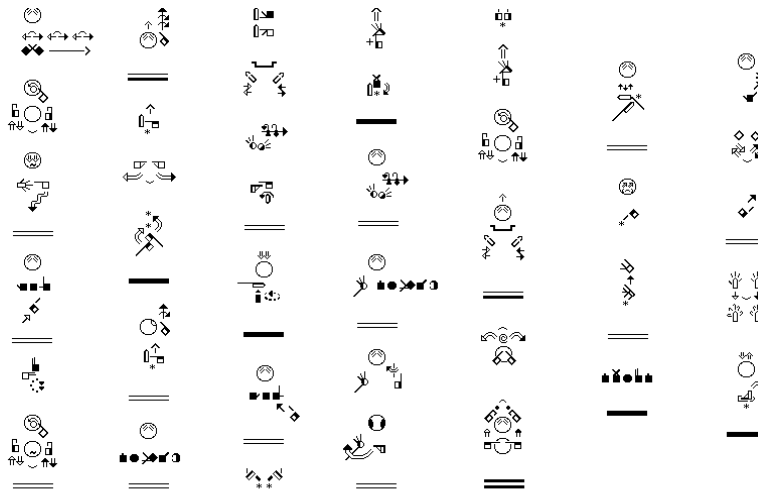
Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,



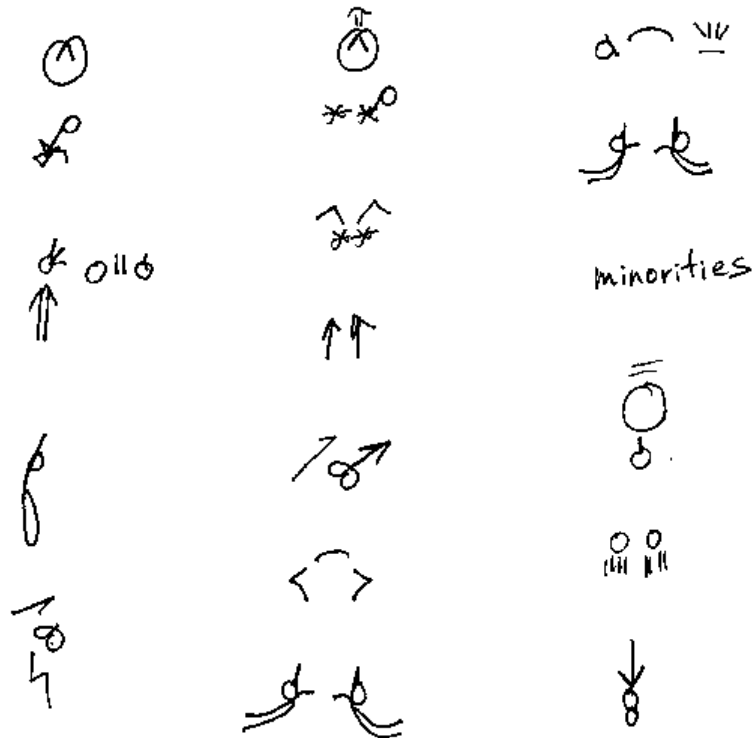
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.



Stacked SignWriting can be printed and read at very small sizes...



In 1997, **Cursive SignWriting** started to evolve...The Shorthand has changed from a stenography system for professionals, into a cursive handwriting for daily use:





## Kevin Clark

Using "Stacked SignWriting" seemed more natural to me and easier to read and write in comparison to the English order of writing from left to right. Really, the Stacked style is easier to read and write - And I'm sure that once you use it, you too will agree with me.

You know, I'll never forget how I learned about SignWriting. It was through a friend of mine, Kathy Say. She mentioned SignWriting. And at first I was mystified, naturally, never having heard about it before. She told me that it was a writing system that can be used to document signed languages. This piqued my interest. So, I went to the DAC meeting - The Deaf Action Committee meeting that she invited me to attend. And right there, at that meeting I learned so much, wow! I could see the many benefits of using this system. It could be used in the Educational setting, or used to preserve signed language, or quite possibly be used to write ASL to one another, eventually becoming the written language for ASL.

Clearly, many benefits could be derived from this system. And, something else that I'll never forget is how we - Cindy and I, while we were working on the filming of a SignWriting Lesson yesterday - Had a special guest show up by the name of Abdul Aziz from Saudi Arabia. He was also interested in SignWriting and wanted very much to learn all about it. That truly was a special event - And I believe - Yes, we did an interview with him - And so now, you'll get to see it.





Denny Voreck interviews  
**Abdul Aziz Al-Obaid**  
 of Saudi Arabia



**Denny**

Hello, I'm Denny Voreck, and this is my name sign, "Denny".

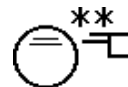


In today's interview, we will be discussing the topic "the Deaf Community and Deaf Linguistics".

Now, our guest with us today is an individual by the name of Abdul Aziz Al-Obaid, and this is his name sign "Aziz".



And he's with us from Saudi Arabia. And this is the sign for Saudi Arabia:



Because it represents the type of headdress that they wear.



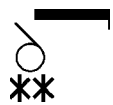
Our guest is sitting right here next to me. Ok, I'd like to start off by asking your thoughts on the American Deaf Community, Deaf Culture, and Deaf Linguistics.



**Aziz**

I have done a lot - For 10 years I have not been working, but instead I've traveled around the world.

From what I've seen - The Americans seem more fascinated and absorbed with the Deaf Community, and with anything having to pertain to the Deaf, especially with the hot issues and discussions dealing with the intricacies and complexities of the language of ASL. It's impressive to see how the interest in all of this has persisted even up till now, and including of late the issue of SignWriting, of which I've come across this past month.



**Denny**

Well, welcome to America. Now, you mentioned SignWriting. So, I'm interested in what your thoughts and feelings are about this SignWriting Project?





☐\*~\*~\* **Aziz**

Well, I think it's another sign or example of growth of the "Deaf Identity". Similar to what has occurred with other ethnic groups in America.

☐\*~\*~\* **Denny**

Thank you. All right, I would now like to ask your opinion on how we can get SignWriting to be officially recognized by the governments and deaf educational institutions, and as a part of linguistics? Also, what about in your educational institutions in Saudi Arabia?

☐\*~\*~\* **Aziz**

Well, I think it has to happen at the governmental level. What I mean, is that, if the people involved in politics and the rest of the American people accept and view the Deaf as being like any other "ethnic entity", then, and only then, will it be recognized and accepted by the governments.

Now, with regards to the educational institutions - I think you have to begin the change with the politics in America. And then you'll be able to bring about an acceptance among the various systems of education in America.



**Denny**

Ok, so when SignWriting is finally accepted and recognized by the government...do you envision SignWriting beginning to blossom and flourish and succeed to the extent, that perhaps by the year 2000, it will be used in the various institutions all-over and perhaps internationally?



**Aziz**

Well, I think for any idea to take root, you have to start with the place or community from which it is stemming. Once you have it growing and blossoming there, then you can begin to have it spread and flourish throughout the rest of the nation.



**Denny**

So when SignWriting does grow and proliferate through literature and as a writing system, what similarities would then take place, such as what happened with your language, the Arabic language? Would you please expound to what has happened historically with Arabic.





## Aziz

Sure. Really what has happened historically with SignWriting is pretty comparable to what the Arabic language has experienced over the years to become a very strong and enduring language. You see, in the beginning, the Arabic language started off as a spoken language only, without having a written component to it. Quite similar to ASL today, where it is a manual-visual language without a written form. Once a written form was established, then Arabic was able to become a truly rich and fruitful language. The situation today is no less similar for the Deaf. Where their language is spoken or communicated only through signing, it doesn't have a written form as of yet. So in order for the language of the Deaf to truly become a rich and prosperous language it needs the written form.

### **Three photos to the left:**

Aziz attended Gallaudet University in Washington D.C, and arranged for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to participate in the Deaf Way Festival held at Gallaudet in 1989. Aziz has been awarded certificates of appreciation from H.R.H. Prince Bandar Bin Sultan Bin Abdulaziz, the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States, and from Dr. Hamad I. Al-Salloom, the Saudi Cultural Attaché to the United States, in recognition of his distinguished service in representing his native land in international forums.





## Denny

You make a good point there. I can't argue with that. So now I would like to ask you, how do you foresee SignWriting being transmitted? Through the vehicle of huge bound volumes, or through the use of computers, via print or electronically? Exactly what do you envision happening with SignWriting in the future?



## Aziz

Well, I envision that in the future it will reach its highest potential indeed. SignWriting will experience tremendous growth and popularity in its usage. Just like for the hearing peoples in England and in France, both populations have very strong and powerful organizations because in France, they have the spoken French, and they have the dictionaries for the written French, and the literature etc. And in England they have the same thing for the same reasons. So in my opinion I foresee that the same powerful growth will happen for the Deaf worldwide through the popularity and use of SignWriting.



## Denny

Thank you very much for your thoughts about this. For your information, there is already an organization established for SignWriting. It is the Deaf Action Committee, or the DAC for short, and it has been in existence since 1984. So we want to thank you for interviewing with us, and we really appreciate you being here today!





## Butch

While you were relating your experiences with SignWriting, I realized that my experience was quite similar to yours. I recall that the first time I was introduced to SignWriting, I too found it somewhat strange and absurd. And then Donald Baer, who used to work at the Salk Institute at the same time I was working there, told me that it worked. But I was a little skeptical, because I had seen several systems out there, and I really didn't like them. But now he said this one works.

So I wanted to see this for myself. I went to the same meeting that you went to, and it was there that I saw the astounding potential. It is perfectly compatible to any signed language. So after that, I felt I could back this system up. Really, this was the first time I support any sign notation system. So I ended up getting involved, and have been working with it ever since.

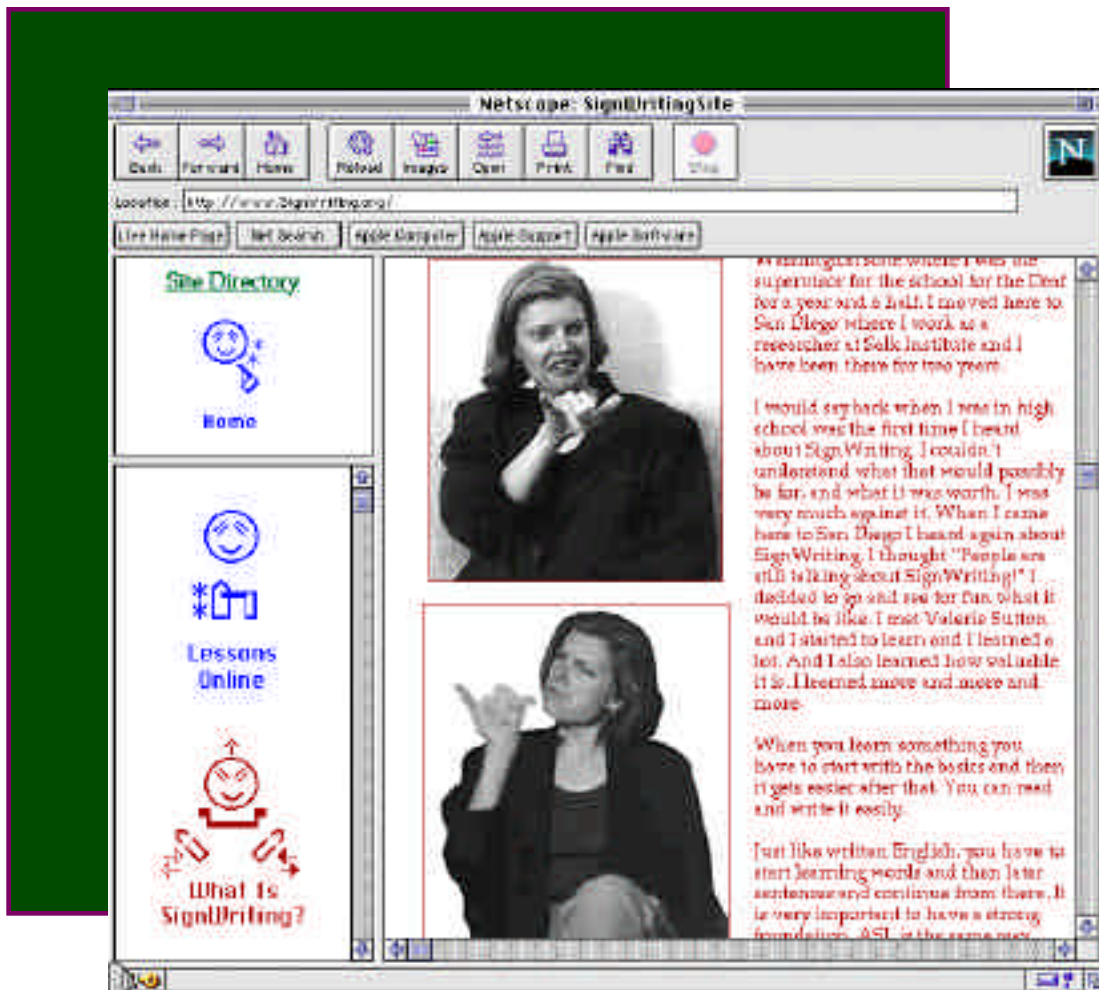
My reaction was just like yours in the beginning. I was resistant. But now, I am totally involved and taken by it. And I hope that others will feel the same way and open their minds and really get their feet wet...really become emmersed with SignWriting.

I remember at the same time I was working with Karen van Hoek and Richard Gleaves, who is the computer programming specialist. Then there was Kathy Say, Bonita Ewan Thorn and myself...the three of us. I will never forget, during one summer, we were ready to work with the computer program, whereas before we had to write everything by hand. So now, we had the computer system ready. We were one of the first to actually use this program. So we spent time getting used to it and making some adjustments.

But then, during the summer, we had some scheduling conflicts, so we ended up renting one laptop computer. So we had to take turns using it with each other, to enter signs in the dictionary. In the beginning, it was a small dictionary, but after we took turns using it every week throughout the summer, we finally ended up with some 3000 signs. And that was really something else!

The dictionary will be on the internet. We are in the process of setting that up. So that will mean people will be able to access the information online, downloading the signs they would like into computer files. So.. wow! Talking about a new era in the computer world! And we will be the first to be there. That's fantastic!!





You can read more  
Deaf opinions on SignWriting  
on the World Wide Web.  
Come visit the **SignWritingSite** at:

<http://www.SignWriting.org>