

Chapter 4 The SignWriter Newspaper 1981-1984



Fall, 1981 - Summer, 1984

The SignWriter Newspaper

was a 12 to 24 page newspaper, published quarterly. It was the first newspaper in history to be written in the movements of signed languages. Most articles were written in two languages: English and American Sign Language. It was distributed free to Deaf people in 41 countries.

Today's SignWriting publications would not be the same, if it were not for the research and development done through the publication of the SignWriter Newspaper. **The Newspaper had historic influence on how SignWriting is written today.**

The first Deaf journalists on the Newspaper staff were pioneers. They were the first group of Deaf adults to truly become skilled at writing their native language. At that time, signed languages were not considered "written languages". It was a controversial idea to "try to write signs", and all who worked on the Newspaper staff experienced resistance to this concept, from both Deaf and hearing people. New ideas take time for acceptance, something the staff had no choice but to learn the hard way. But there were many strong supporters of SignWriting too. **The Newspaper was a catalyst for debating the issue of Sign Language Literacy.** It was also a catalyst for developing a [way to type signs](#).

Below...

In 1981, there was no way to type SignWriting. Each issue of the SignWriter Newspaper was written by hand with ink pens....





Below...

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



Below...

It took 3 months to write one issue by hand.
The first issue, published Fall, 1981,
was written by hand by Founding Editor,
Nancy Ellen Woo (now [Nancy Romero](#)).
Nancy continued to write each issue by hand
for several years. It was tiring, painstaking work.





Below...

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**.

Below Lucinda is joined by other Newspaper staff members, including (from left to right) Kevin Struxness, Dennis Schemenauer and illustrator Frank Allen Paul.



Below...

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



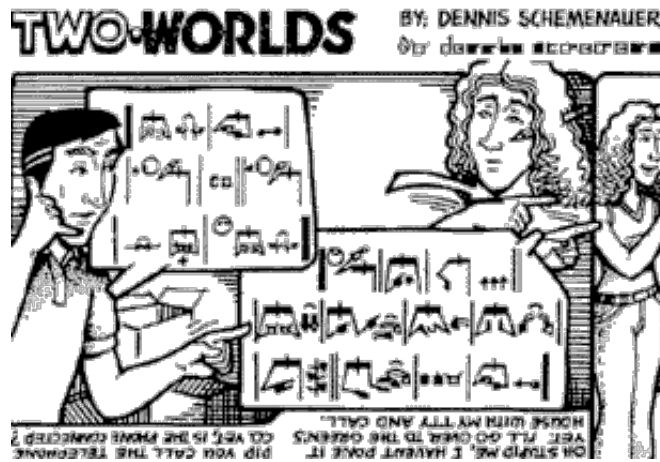
Below...

Managing Editor, Susan Diamond Bucher, edited each Sign Language article, working with Deaf reporters on writing American Sign Language grammar.



Below...

Dennis Schemenauer and illustrator Frank Allen Paul created a cartoon strip written in SignWriting.



Below...

Vicki Santillanes wrote a "Dear Vicki" column in American Sign Language, answering questions from the Deaf Community.



Vicki Santillanes,
Sig Writer®
Columnist

"Dear Vicki"

By Vicki Santillanes

The "Dear Vicki" column in The Sign Writer™ Newspaper is like a "Dear Abby" column in other newspapers.

If you have problems, write to "Dear Vicki".

c/o The Sign Writer™ Newspaper, P.O. BOX 7344,
Newport Beach, C.A. 92660



Dear Reader,

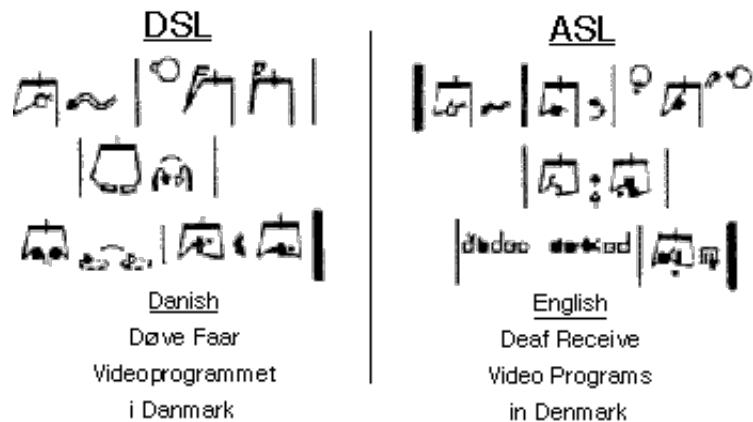
Since I have not received any letters from you, can that mean that you have no problems? If you have problems and desire assistance, I am happy to help you. Please write for help.

From Vicki

Below...

History was made when articles were written in four languages:

1. Danish Sign Language (DSL)
2. American Sign Language (ASL)
3. English and 4. Danish...



Below...

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



The SignWriter Newspaper resumed publication as the **SignWriter Newsletter** in 1989, typed by computer.

Since 1996, the SignWriter Newsletter has been posted regularly on the World-Wide-Web. You can read the latest issue on the [SignWriting Web Site](http://www.SignWriting.org), www.SignWriting.org.

Want to know more?

SignWriting is used in 27 countries in 2004, with multiple web sites and a growing number of publications and new software.

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SignWriting Web Site
<http://www.SignWriting.org>
Read & Write Sign Languages

SignBank Web Site
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Sign Language Dictionaries