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[Home](#) > POWAY WOMAN TRANSLATE GOSPEL INTO WRITTEN SIGN LANGUAGE

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[More January 2011 Articles](#) [People Power](#) [San Diego Bookshelf](#) [American Sign Language](#) [ASL](#) [Gospel](#) [Gospel for deaf](#) [Nancy Romero](#) [Poway](#) [Sign Writing](#) [Signwriting](#) [Valerie Sutton](#)



Former dancer draws inspiration from La Jolla woman who created a written sign language, inspiring a global movement

January 30, 2011 (Poway) –Ballerinas Nancy Romero and Valerie Sutton met during their dancing careers—and soon turned their creative energies to helping deaf people read in sign language. “It happened by accident,” recalls Romero, a Poway resident who recently completed writing *The Gospel According to John* in American Sign Language (ASL).

Sutton had been writing down dance movements using stick figures since she was a young girl. While teaching dancing at the Royal Danish Ballet Company in Copenhagen, Denmark, she was asked by a university representative to create a written version of a video. She did so, using Danish sign language. “Then she came back here and started learning ASL,” said Romero, adding, “Structure and signs are different everywhere.”

Nancy Romero signs a greeting In Old Poway Park.

Sutton recognized that ASL is not simply English spoken the hands, but rather a separate language in its own right. “Nobody had ever written down sign language before Valerie,” said Romero, who believes people should have a right to read in their own native language—including sign languages around the world. “Now, deaf people are reading scripture in their own native language for the first time.

Romero, who is not deaf, found her new calling after suffering an injury that ended her dance career. “When I got hurt, I wanted to keep moving,” she recalled. “Sign language is so beautiful, so I learned it. It took two years.”



Valerie Sutton

"Hello, are you? Fine!"

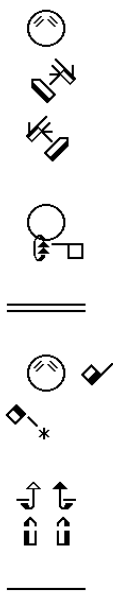


Nancy Romero, right, with editor Lucinda O'Grady Batch, left

Raised a Catholic, Romero now attends the Marantha Chapel, which means “The Lord Cometh” in Aramaic. “I was the lead interpreter for the deaf there,” said the Poway resident, who was also the founding editor of “The Sign Writer Newspaper” which featured articles in ASL translated into English. “The issues were completed entirely by hand and published by the Center for Sign Writing. Copies were sent to people in 40 countries!”

Writing down *The Gospel According to John* in written signs took two years, with another two years of editing and layout by ASL editor Lucinda O'Grady Batch. The translation is based on the New Living version of the Bible, published by Tyndale Publishing.

“This was presented at the Vatican last November,” Romero said with pride. Copies of the book may be obtained at <http://www.signwriting.org/library/bible/> for a donation.



Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

The website www.signwriting.org , inspired by Sutton’s work, has mushroomed into a thriving online community that now includes links to order sign-writing software, products such as mouse pads, greeting cards and coffee cups with messages in written sign language, and sign-written books including world literature, encyclopedias, dictionaries, children’s books, and textbooks. There is a sign writing blog and a map of more than 40 countries that now have written sign languages.

Romero’s gospel translation has inspired a Maltese sign language version. “There are actually 400 deaf people on that island,” she said. The dancer-turned-translator also receives weekly requests from a deaf church in Michigan to translate the weekly sermon. “They put it overhead and people in the congregation have pages or laptops, following along.”

What’s next for Romero?

“I’ve already completed the Gospel of Matthew and the Book of Romans,” she disclosed. “Tyndale has given us permission to translate the entire New Testament, so I’ll be busy.”

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