

## Sutton Movement Writing & Shorthand

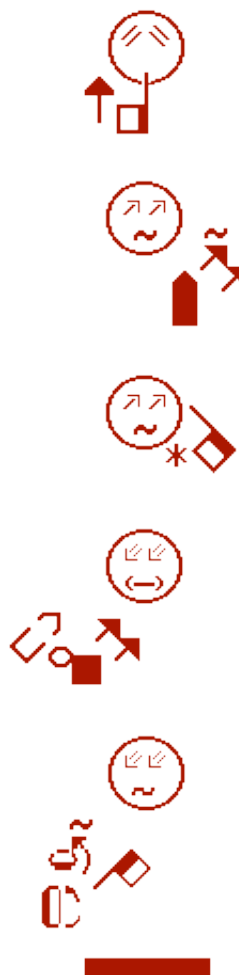


## A Global Writing System For A Global Age

...not tied to any one culture or any one language...  
 ...recording hundreds of languages, bringing cultures together...



Valerie Sutton, 1985. Photo by Barry Slobin.



### Introduction

Sutton Movement Writing is a global writing system. It is no accident that it has been invented at a time when the entire world is coming together, learning from each other and benefiting from cross-communication.

For we are all a product of our experiences, and I was blessed to be born at a time when the

world was becoming smaller. There were telephones, radios, televisions and airplanes when I was born in 1951. And later the personal computer and the internet has had, and continues to have, an enormous influence on the success of my invention.

One thing is for sure....Sutton Movement Writing & Shorthand would not exist, if I had not been born.

And although the invention turned 25 years old in 1999, its acceptance by the global community is just beginning. The seeds were planted in the previous millenium, but the true use of the writing system will be in the 21st century.

Many do not realize the impact Sutton Movement Writing will have, because they have never heard of it, or do not understand why it is needed...and yet the need is great, and the impact will be felt in time.

There have been inventors of writing systems in history. I am luckier than many of them, for I am seeing my invention used in my lifetime. Other inventors have not been so lucky. Louis Braille, born in France in 1809, was blind himself, and died in 1852 at the age of 43, before the value of his invention was recognized. The Braille writing system was actually banned in some schools for the blind in his lifetime, although he did have a small group of followers. Several decades after his death, Braille's invention was used worldwide. But being born in the 1800's held him back from reaching multitudes of people quickly in his lifetime. He did not have the internet!

I am sure we can all relate to the feelings of frustration he must have felt, and I only wish he could see today what a blessing Braille is for thousands of blind people.

And although the Cherokee Indian chief Sequoyah did see his writing system used in his lifetime...he almost didn't, because his own people tried him for treason for writing the Cherokee language. It was a culture shock for the Cherokee Indians, to think of their spoken language as a written language. They thought it was witchcraft. If he had not taught the jurors in his treason trial to read and write, which they found surprisingly easy, Sequoyah would have been put to death! So he would not have seen it used in his lifetime either, if the confusion and fear of his own people had won over his vision and foresight. It took 25 years for Sequoyah to receive acceptance. Because of him and his patient persistence, the rich Cherokee language is preserved for posterity. Today there is even a computer program named Sequoyah for typing Cherokee, a far cry from writing by hand as the Cherokees did while Sequoyah was alive in the mid 1800's.

And just as Sequoyah's writing system started to be used around the 25th year of development, SignWriting also started to spread in the late 1990's, around the 25th year of its development. SignWriting, although used by hundreds of people today, is still a writing system in its infancy, since more years are needed to solidify writing grammar and teaching people to read and write. But the phenomenon of "reading and writing Sign Language Literature" is now occurring in 16 countries...something that has never happened before.

Sometimes people confuse SignWriting with other transcription systems used by linguistic research, or they confuse DanceWriting with other dance notation systems. These other systems do not have the same goals or uses. There is no way to truly categorize Sutton Movement Writing, for there is no equivalent in history.

### **Try to imagine this:**

ONE **sound-writing** system for writing all

music, all noises that have no meaning, screeching, animal sounds, automobile sounds, airplane sounds, the sounds of the wind, PLUS the same writing system used to record German, French, Chinese, Arabic...all spoken languages...all with the same symbols invented by one inventor. Since (as far as I know), English is not written with music notes, and music is not written with the Roman alphabet, it appears that this scenario never happened!

But the equivalent is occurring in the world of writing movement with the invention of Sutton Movement Writing...

It is ONE **movement-writing** system for writing all dance, all mime and gestures that have no meaning, all sports, body language, animal movements, machine movements, the movement of the wind, PLUS the same writing system, called SignWriting in Deaf communities, is becoming the daily writing system for real languages such as American Sign Language, German Sign Language, or Brazilian Sign Language. But whether it be SignWriting or DanceWriting, all movements are written with the SAME symbols invented by one inventor (with LOTS of input from the users of the writing system of course!).



Valerie Sutton, 1972  
Photo by Rimeau Mydtskov, Copenhagen,  
Denmark

So you can see why I feel very blessed...I have been given the gift of living to see my invention used....and how blessed I feel that so many truly wonderful people have contributed to the writing system's success. To all of you, I say "thank you" from the bottom of my heart. Everytime someone sends me a note written in SignWriting, or shares a beautiful dance with me, written in DanceWriting, I feel like a treasure has been handed to me.

You see...all this happened because of a unique set of circumstances...

Life handed me a "deadline".....I was aware as a child that my life was tenuous, and that I was lucky to make it through childhood. I was born with a rare skin condition that was at times life-threatening, and I was told I would die several times throughout my life. Everytime I survived, I felt re-born, and each inspiring gift of renewal made me even more determined to leave the world a better place before I die. So my ongoing life-long struggle of being invalided, being forced to face my own mortality, and then miraculously recovering, created the perfect conditions for the development of the invention. I have lived many lifetimes within my 48 years, but each lifetime has only reinforced my dedication to my life's work.

After all...what does a dancer do when she is too ill to dance? She invents a way to write dance of course! If I had not been born ill, I would have been too well to want to sit around and write - ha! So the combination of a dancer with time on her hands...was a terrific combination!!

Who would ever have thought that the unique circumstances of a dancer who was trapped by her own physical limitations, would have led to the written form for signed languages used by deaf people? I could not have predicted that....

My personal limitations led me to a writing system that is limitless, freeing others from the limitations of illiteracy.

So human imagination has no boundaries, and by bringing the illusive to written form, SignWriting is giving the previously-unrecorded literature of the Deaf, a concrete foothold in recorded history.

I feel that the special circumstances that have made Sutton Movement Writing the system that it is, was created by a higher power. Somehow I have been blessed to bring this invention to the world, and I accept my duty seriously, and with optimistic conviction.



**Valerie Sutton**  
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La Jolla, California

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**Sutton's Autobiography**  
**Chapter One: Early Childhood**



