




**DIVERSE
VOICES**

**INTERVIEW
SERIES**

Interview with Judy Jenner

**Interview and
Questions by
Romina Espinosa**



Q: Tell us about your experience in your profession.

It's been an incredible 20-year ride in translation and interpreting. I started out as a translator as early as high school and worked as a translator at a bilingual magazine in college, and then as an in-house translation department manager for a dot-com company before joining my twin sister in our boutique translation and interpreting business, Twin Translations. It's been my pleasure to give back to the profession as much as I possibly can throughout the years, because one of my life goals is leaving T&I in better shape than when I started: more professional, with better pay, and with colleagues who support each other. In order to achieve this goal, I've served in many volunteer capacities, including as the president of the Nevada Interpreters and Translators Association, a spokesperson of the American Translators Association, a member of the ATA's strategy committee, member of the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT) conference planning committee, etc. However, I am probably proudest of the teaching I've done, as I am very passionate about training the next generation of linguists. I've taught for the online program of the University of California-San Diego Extension's translation and interpreting program for 10 years now – time flies! I also have the honor of teaching in-person conference interpreting classes at my alma mater, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. In terms of my own credentials, I hold an undergraduate and a master's degree in business from UNLV and a master's degree in conference interpreting from York University in Toronto, Canada. I am a federally certified Spanish court interpreter, court-registered German interpreter, master-level court-certified Spanish interpreter (Nevada) and I am also court-certified in California. I am also a highly experienced conference interpreter, and my claim to fame is having interpreted for then-presidential candidate Joe Biden during the campaign trail.

Q: What makes you passionate about your profession?

As trite as it sounds, I do think that languages are an incredibly powerful tool and we must use it well to perhaps better the world or at least facilitate communication. Without interpreters and translators, there would be no diplomacy, international commerce, cross-national communication – nothing. It's a bit aggregate responsibility and it is inspiring to see what our profession can do.

Q: Can you share a moment when you felt valued or appreciated in your profession?

I have been lucky that there have been so many. But one that stands out is that an end client once sent me flowers through the law firm that hired me in appreciation of the positive outcome they received from a civil law suit. I'd worked on that case for years, and it was challenging and complex, but I got paid very well for my services, which already made me feel very appreciated. The flowers were the final amazing touch – the client sent flowers to everyone at the law firm, and they made sure to remember the interpreter, even though I don't work in-house for that firm. It felt really nice. In their thank-you note they said they would never have been able to litigate without me, and I think they are right –but of course I am sure a colleague would have taken great care of them, too. In addition, it is always very moving when a colleague comes up to me and tells me that the book about the business side of translation that I co-authored with my twin sister has changed their life or their career in a positive way. It's incredibly meaningful that the book that we wrote – which was quite a labor of love – has had such a widespread impact. I never thought that it would be so widely appreciated, and it feels amazing to get such positive feedback from colleagues.



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National Association of Educational
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Q: Name a few challenges that you can share with us today.

Unfortunately, there are many challenges indeed, starting with pay. We must continue working to elevate the profile of the profession and to truly professionalize it. We also must continue education not only the public but mainly key decision-makers about how essential our services are – and I am mainly talking about judges, administrators, etc. I see a disturbing trend of decreasing fee schedules in our profession, and we must push back as a profession, and we must push hard. The other big elephant in the room is machine translation for translators – is it friend or foe? I'd say both. I do believe staying on top of current trends and learning what the outside factors that influence our profession are is very much part of the job.

Q: What advice would you give to new interpreters and/or translators?

I think newcomers should understand, first and foremost, that the majority of work for T&I in the US is freelance-based. So if you are looking for an in-house job, T&I isn't a good solution. Most linguists in this country run their own small businesses, and it's not for everyone. It's important to ask yourself the question: do I want to be self-employed? I am not saying there are no in-house position, but there are relatively few, especially compared to other countries such as the UK. Secondly, being passionate about languages is key – but it's not enough. You need actual hard skills to make it in this profession, and too often I see students who love languages and want to pursue translation but don't have any writing skills. That's akin to wanting to be an architect with no math skills. So it's key to be humble and take a hard look at your skills, as you will be competing on the open market with thousands of seasoned colleagues who do have very impressive skills. Finally, don't forget about the importance of networking but also remember that you must give before you can take. Newcomers often want advice from seasoned linguists, which is of course fine, but to be successful in the long run you also have to give back – and you don't have to have a lot of experience in T&I to help out. For instance, some of my former students have gone on to edit the newsletter for their local associations and have even been the presidents of regional associations. In fact, the editor of this newsletter, Romina Espinosa, is a former student of mine – and I could not be more proud.



Judy Jenner is a Spanish and German business and legal translator and a federally certified Spanish court interpreter as well as conference interpreter. She has an MBA in marketing from the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, a master's degree in conference interpreting from York University in Canada, and runs her boutique translation and interpreting business, Twin Translations, with her twin sister Dagmar. She was born in Austria and grew up in Mexico

City. She is a former in-house translation department manager. Judy writes the blog Translation Times and the "Entrepreneurial Linguist" column for The ATA Chronicle, serves as one of the ATA spokespersons, and teaches interpretation at the University of California-San Diego and at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She is the co-author of The Entrepreneurial Linguist: The Business-School Approach to Freelance Translation. She's a frequent speaker at T&I conferences around the world, mostly online these days. Pre-pandemic, she flew a lot for her interpreting assignments and one of her special talents is memorizing airport codes.



Romina Espinosa (Lima, Peru) is a professional Spanish<->English interpreter and small business owner based in San Diego, California. She has been providing language services since 2017. Romina holds a BA in International Studies from University of California San Diego, a minor in Spanish Literature

completed at the University of Granada, Spain and an MA in Gender and Diversity Studies from University of Oviedo, Spain. She furthered her interdisciplinary studies by completing a Certificate in Translation and Interpretation (Spanish/English) from University of California San Diego Extension. Ms. Espinosa is recognized in the United States as a Certified Healthcare Interpreter-Spanish through the Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI). Her areas of expertise include conference, community, education, immigration, medical, and mental health interpreting. When Romina is not interpreting, she spends her time running outdoors (she is a five-time international marathon runner), expressing her creativity through acrylic painting and poetry, and being present for her loved ones.



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