

## Profiles

Viola Lier: Freelance tourist guide and trainer

**How did you get into working in interpretation?**

I'm not entirely sure! I grew up in East Germany, and some say you had to be good at interpretation to make new sense of the world almost overnight when the Berlin Wall came down. I suppose I got where I am now by chance, and by following my interests and instincts. After years of project management on capacity building projects in Central Europe I sought inspiration from Scottish History evening classes. Our lecturer breathed life into the facts, and I got to experience my first real live interpreter. The course led on to a Blue Badge Tourist Guide qualification – a risky career move at the age of 32! Soon I discovered that this was the type of interpretation for me. It's the most creative medium I've come across: working with people, experiencing places and exploring stories, whilst being your own boss.

**What has been a formative or inspiring experience in your career?**

The Blue Badge Tourist Guide training has been one of the most formative experiences, and I find every question from visitors inspiring. If I had to pick a specific moment or person, I'd nominate a self-appointed guide I met in Turkey. She noticed we were looking for some ancient rock tombs, tied her goat to a tree, and led us off with a smile through back yards and along tiny passages. Without much English she managed to convey a sense of ancient times and shape our understanding of the tombs. I was tempted to hand over my Blue Badge to her there and then.

**What frustrates you about the field?**

Being asked, 'So what's your real job?' Understandable perhaps: I'm visibly enjoying myself when I work. I would wish that the contribution interpreters make to communities, society, conservation, the economy and, dare I say, to shaping the future, is recognised more.

**What advice would you give to someone interested in interpretation as a career?**

Being a live interpreter is what you are, not what you do. You must love your subject. You must be easily inspired and motivated. You must also love working with people, be patient, open minded, caring. You won't get rich as a tourist guide, but it can be extremely fulfilling and creative.

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Jim Gillies: Recreation manager for Forestry Commission Scotland's Inverness Forest District (South)

How did you get into working in interpretation?

I've been involved in 'Interpretation' for over 40 years... though not always aware of it! It started when I left school at fifteen and got a job constructing displays for advertising campaigns with Scope Publicity Studios in Glasgow.

Having a passion for Scottish hills and wildlife, most weekends saw me hitching north. That's when I realised I would prefer to live and work in the countryside, so I left Scope and took a ghillie's job at Loch Assynt. 25 years later, I was still doing the same job, albeit as head stalker for Lord Seafield.

But days on the hill weren't all about shooting – we'd often have long conversations about wildlife and Scottish culture. Guests ranged from Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the ex-president of France, to Bryan Ferry, so we had some very interesting discussions! All interpretation surely, and at its best... face to face.

What has been a formative or inspiring experience in your career?

After my time as a ghillie I started working at Rothiemurchus Estate: at that time they were leaders in interpretation. I spent three fruitful years taking the general public, school and college groups out ... all in all a tremendous training ground.

Fifteen years ago I was lucky enough to obtain the position of recreation ranger with the Forestry Commission based at Glenmore, now in the heart of the Cairngorms National Park. All the artistic, practical and interpersonal skills I've gained over 40 odd years have been put to good use here. As part of the 'design team' I've helped to shape the Visitor Centre interpretation, shying away from 'corporate panels' and 'mission statements'.

Now nearing retirement, are you going to stop interpreting?

Surely that would be the same as saying I'm going to stop talking!

What advice would you give someone starting on a career in interpretation?

Study hard, find some form of practical work and worthwhile hobbies to liven up your C.V.... and you'll get there in the end!

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Creative minds have always been known to survive any kind of bad training.

*Anna Freud, psychoanalyst*