

COURT REPORTING: MY CAREER, MY PASSION

BY DENNON BURTON

EU HRO*F KOURT RORT/G. Yes, this may look just like scrambled letters that will not make sense to most people, but in the court reporting world, it is the foreign language of steno for “I love court reporting.”

I knew what I wanted my career to be my junior year of high school when I learned about court reporting from a good friend’s mom who was a court reporter. Of course, I had no idea what the training entailed or what the stenograph machine really was. After graduating from high school, I was forced to take a year off and work full-time to save money for college before I could start my journey. That, for me, was the best decision I could have made. I knew after that year I was not giving up on my dream. I took it more seriously and, more importantly, I knew how hard it was to make ends meet working a minimum-wage job.



The court reporting school in my home state of Iowa was AIB College of Business in Des Moines, two hours from my hometown of Cedar Falls. It was a process getting there, but I finally made it. From the first day of school, it was overwhelming and intimidating, but I knew right away that it was for me. It was definitely more challenging than I ever expected. There was so much to learn about court reporting, the theory, the steno machine, and then speed tests which were grueling. In the beginning, there were 30 people who started in my class, and the advisor made the statement that, typically speaking, only about half of us would make it to graduation due to the training being so intense. I remember she said that according to statistics, the drop-out rate was higher than that of the drop-out rate for medical school. That was a scary statistic to hear!

The first whole year was learning the theory. That part was especially interesting to me. I loved the thought of being the only one, aside from other court reporters, that knew how to read this “foreign language.” After we learned the theory, the next step to graduation was speed building. I was flying through the speed classes and knew at that point this career was for me. When I graduated three years later with my Bachelor's Degree, there were only 7 of us left out of the 30 who started. I felt so accomplished and could not wait to get into the working world.

My first court reporting position was at the Black Hawk County Courthouse in Waterloo, Iowa. I even made a lifelong friend of a fellow court reporter who mentored

me along the way. It was a great place to start out, but I knew I wanted to relocate eventually. After a few years, I came upon an opening in Sturgis, South Dakota. I had a Skype interview with Judge Eckrich and was offered the position almost immediately. I was informed they wanted me to start in just two weeks to make it in time for the 75th Sturgis Motorcycle Rally (a very busy time at the courthouse in Sturgis). I was nervous to move over 650 miles away from my family and familiar surroundings but excited to start a new chapter.

The day I walked into the courthouse, everyone was so friendly and welcoming, and that has not changed. I worked with Judge Eckrich for two years before he retired, and I am thankful for the many things I learned from him. I was nervous not knowing who would replace him, but I got lucky with Judge Swanson. He has been wonderful to work with, and I know our partnership will only continue to strengthen. I can't forget to mention the four other court reporters in my circuit (4th Circuit). Each one has helped strengthen me as a court reporter and person. They are not only great colleagues, but great friends that I will forever cherish.

I am so grateful for my court reporting career. At this point in my journey, I feel strong and am doing what I love. Every day is challenging and rewarding. It is a very interesting job, and I learn something new each and every day. It is of great satisfaction knowing that I am an important part of the judicial system in getting an accurate record. I am excited to see where the next chapter of my court reporting career takes me, but I am pretty satisfied right where I am with fabulous colleagues and a fantastic career.