

Every word is crucial court reporter explains in describing work

The next time you are witness to a heated debate among friends, imagine trying to record on paper—word for word—what they're saying.

It's almost impossible, according to Corinne Mauro of Milton, court reporter in the civil division of the County Court for the Judicial District of York in Toronto. It's her job, along with about 380 other court reporters employed by the Ontario Attorney-General's Office, to record every spoken word in courtrooms across the province.

"Even someone mumbling under his breath at the back of the room, you can never be fast enough," she says, not even with her Stenograph shorthand machine, which allows her to write shorthand at speeds of 250 wpm and beyond.

It might not matter who said what during a debate among friends. In a court of law, however, every word counts.

"Court reporters are important because if testimony isn't recorded, how can a judgment be made," Corinne asks.

But what about trying to accurately record a Crown Attorney shooting dozens of questions at a witness, a defence lawyer excitedly appealing to the judge, and a judge trying to calm

everyone down—all at the same time.

"It terrifies me that I'll miss something," admits Corinne. "Because if the case is appealed, the whole procedure is based on what was previously said in court."

A great deal of legal jargon and testimony from medical experts does not make the job any easier. So Corinne, as a junior reporter, always has a back-up tape recorder ready when something technical is going to be discussed.

Court reporters also have the right to stop testimony at any time, or have it repeated. Although judges are sympathetic to the stresses encountered by reporters, and will often intervene on their behalf—there is always the odd "speedster" who will not slow down, she admits.

A reporter's accuracy is often tested when previous testimony has to be read back to the court. This happened to Corinne on her very first day of work.

It was early last May, just after Corinne graduated from George Brown College's two-year Court Reporting (Stenographic) program in Toronto. Somewhat hesitant to test her newly-acquired skills in the real world, Corinne had arranged to sit in

with a working reporter to increase her speed on the stenograph machine.

During the morning recess, she was informed there was a shortage of reporters that day and the Supervisor offered her the opportunity of officially reporting a case. "I went into the courtroom shaking," she recalls. "About half an hour later, the judge asked me to read back part of the testimony. I nearly died."

Five months later, Corinne has worked in Small Claims Court, and on landlord and Tenant, criminal and civil cases. Her speed on the stenograph machine has increased substantially from about 180 to 200 words a minute.

Court usually convenes at 10 in the morning which means the Corinne must arrive before 9.30 to check the register to see which case she has been assigned. "I check with my supervisor in the morning and that's about it. I'm pretty well my own boss," she explains.

A court case can last five minutes or two months. Either way, Corinne must be present at all times during the proceedings. Working evenings isn't uncommon, while weekend work is rare but not unheard of.

"You can't plan too many social events during the week, because

you never know when court is going to adjourn," she says.

Some cases, of course, are more interesting than others, especially those that are precedent-setting or well publicized in the media. It's hard not to become involved: "I used to lie in bed thinking about cases. But now I've become more callous. Even rapes and murders don't affect me that much."

If a case is fairly lengthy, court will recess for 20 minutes in the morning, giving Corinne and her fingers a chance to stretch. Long lunches, sometimes as lengthy as two hours, are almost standard, something Perry Mason would surely disagree with. Then it's back to court until the afternoon recess, again for about 20 minutes. At the end of the day, Corinne's notes are bound, dated and filed and unless a transcript is requested, must be kept for seven years.

If she is asked to type a transcript of the entire proceedings the cost is about \$2.50 an original page, for whoever wants one—lawyers, judges and clients. And that money goes straight into her pocket. "I'll have made about \$1,500 in transcript fees in eight months," predicts Corinne, who makes another \$13,500 a year as a starting salary. But typing tran-

scripts—anything from evidence proceedings, charges to the jury, final judgments, lawyers' submissions and their addresses to the jury—is sometimes tedious, frustrating work. It might involve phoning lawyers and judges to verify statements, or it could mean research in court libraries to extract an exact quote from a previous case that is being used by a lawyer in this one.

This work also includes combing each final page for grammar and punctuation mistakes, or searching for the spelling of some obscure word or place in one of numerous reference books she has been forced to accumulate. "I spend about 20 hours a week doing transcripts on top of my daily reporting duties," she says.

After three years experience and successful completion of exams conducted by the Chartered Shorthand Reporters' Association, Corinne will qualify as a Chartered Shorthand Reporter (CSR), enabling her to apply for a job with the Supreme Court of Ontario, where—amazingly—women reporters weren't allowed until several years ago.

"But there are a lot of women in the field today," says Corinne, who works out of an office with 23 other women reporters.

The Province also employs more than 200 free-lance reporters, making the profession a viable career for those with families. It can mean a lot of travelling, especially if one is assigned to a circuit judge who travels from city to city, where permanent judges are unavailable.

As a level one reporter on probation for a year, Corinne is near the bottom rung of a career ladder that spans any one of Canada's judicial systems, government boards and commissions, parliamentary debates, private companies and even Liquor Control Board hearings.

In a year's time, with the recommendation of her supervisor Corinne could be promoted to a level two reporter. From there she needs her CSR to qualify for a job in the Supreme Court system.

"There are five vacancies on my staff alone," says Corinne's supervisor, Bill Nicolls.

"If you're a person who strives for excellence, there are always opportunities in this field," adds Tom Moran, Manager of Court Reporting Services for the Attorney-General.

Why did Corinne choose court reporting as a career? "I wanted something more than

Halton handing back \$90,000

By Mike Patton

Halton intends to give up to \$90,000 back to homeowners who have been paying sewer surcharge bills even though they are not hooked up to municipal sewers.

Regional Council made the decision Wednesday on advice from Halton's sewer rate committee which also recommended the policy of "forgiveness" should extend into 1981 pending resolution of the financing of the sewer surcharge system.

"We will definitely be issuing cheques (to residents) this year," said Deputy Treasurer Don Farmer.

He added, however, that the region is not yet sure exactly how many Halton residents who

were paying sewer surcharge bills are not connected to the sewer system.

"Some of them have refused to pay, some have paid under protest and some have just paid," Mr. Farmer said.

He estimated the region would be giving somewhere between \$50,000 and \$90,000 in rebates to people who funded the sewer surcharge system without ever benefiting from it.

"People who had sewers available to them but did not want to be connected, we charged them," the deputy treasurer admitted.

In Burlington, there are 124 homeowners not hooked up to municipal sewers and the region intends to advertise to find out how many it

owes money to.

There are roughly the same number of residents not connected to sewerage in Oakville and an estimated 900 in all of Halton.

To qualify for a rebate, the residents must appeal to the region before the end of the year.

Mr. Farmer said the

problem of non-users being billed for sewer surcharges has been under review for a while.

He said he has been advising unconnected homeowners not to pay their surcharge bills even though regional policy said they had to put money into the system.

"What else could I do?" he said.

Littering is ended

A Milton resident is "temporarily" satisfied with a Halton Regional crackdown on roadside dumping.

Mrs. Marilyn Gonneau of Town Line had reported to Halton Public Works Committee on Sept. 22 that Tremaine Rd. near the former Milton Brick yard was filled with debris including an old bed and an abandoned car.

Since the letter, Mrs. Gonneau reported regional crews had been sent out and cleaned up the mess. There was so much it took two days.

Councillor Bill Johnson has repeatedly called for roadside dumpers caught to be charged and brought to court.

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