

# It's a rough journey to journalism

Well, I've finally done it. As of January 14, I've been a full-fledged working journalist for the grand total of one year.

Now some of you may scoff: "You've only been working for a year? You haven't even scratched the surface on the real world yet."

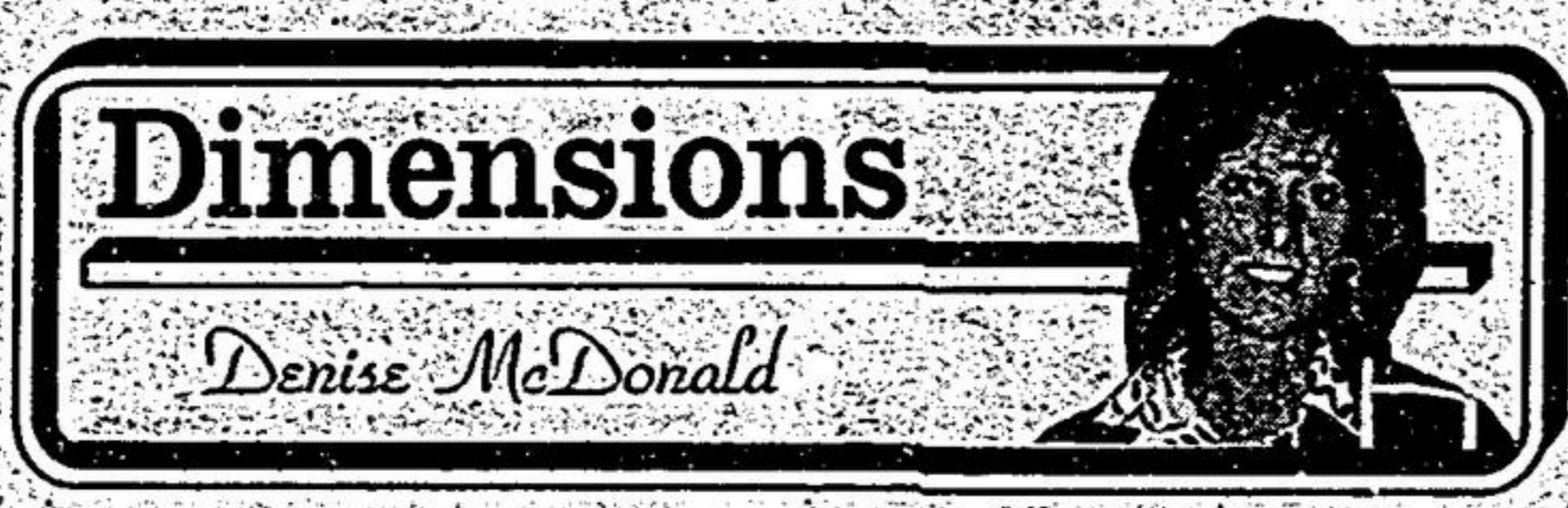
But let me tell you, it's an accomplishment I never thought I'd reach. First of all, I never really intended on being a journalist in the first place.

When I originally thought about continuing my education, I always pictured myself in the creative advertising field.

However, leaving things to the last moment, (as some people have been known to accuse me of) that particular field had already been filled to capacity at my chosen college.

But after talking to the campus registration office and explaining to them why I chose advertising in the first place, they decided my particular qualities of expertise would be better suited towards journalism.

Sounded like a good idea to me. Having always considered myself to be a fairly decent writer, you can well imagine my dismay, when the program coordinator, John Lott, informed my entire class, not one of



## Dimensions

Denise McDonald

us was accomplished enough to consider ourselves writers at all. Back to the basics.

Although the first year saw over 50 per cent of my class drop out for one reason or another, I toughed it out.

Perhaps it stemmed from the fact I always disliked high school and wanted to give this new environment a chance. Or perhaps, it was my mother, standing over me, saying: "If you even think about it..."

Year two was almost my undoing. On the first day of the new semester in January, I happened to look at my class schedule and saw written in bold letters "Creative Interviewing." Even the way it was written on the page spelled doom for me.

"Didn't you know you had to conduct two interviews in front of the whole class?" said one third year

senior. "Trust me, it's really scary stuff."

No kidding. This is the person who always developed a classic case of the flu every time I was required to take part in public speaking at high school. I just couldn't do it, my knees turned to mush, my heart started racing and I talked so fast, my speech was always over before any of my classmates had even sat down.

"I'm leaving John, I just can't face speaking in front of the whole class."

"Or no you're not," was his answer. "You're going to get up there and do it just like everyone else."

Would you believe I got an 'A' on both assignments. I still can't.

Next came the practical side of the course, working as a real reporter on The East York Observer, a

paper put out by my class but in no way affiliated with the college.

There are definite advantages to being thin. You can always hide behind someone when assignments are being given out.

And I always had the best excuses.

"Well, I called John, but he wasn't home, so I left a message with his wife. When he didn't return my call, I tried him again, but this time he was in the shower and leaving for Africa as soon as he got out. Then when I finally did reach him, he said he didn't know anything about it, and I'd have to try another department head."

During the entire year I was involved with The Observer, my classmates and I worked out of a downstairs office that was connected to John's by a phone.

We used to call it "The Voice of Doom."

When it rang, we always knew someone was in trouble.

"Do it again," became my three most hated words.

Then when I finally found out I was to do my last semester's placement at The Tribune, I had mixed emotions.

I knew no one could possibly be as demanding as John Lott. Yet I knew nothing about Jim Thomas, and still didn't know if I had what it took to survive in the world of journalism.

Jim quickly put my fears to rest. Always quick with a compliment or a helpful word of 'criticism,' he saw to it not only was my placement an enjoyable experience, but he showed me journalism was something to be enjoyed, not feared.

I haven't had a moment's regret since then.

Sure, I've had the odd sarcastic barb, along with some less than positive comments regarding a few of my articles, but you can't please everyone.

And I've gone from a person who was lucky to write a two inch brief in a week, to one who now writes on the average eight to 10, 15 inch features in the same time span.

Although I'm now long past those three years of college, having worked freelance and then been employed full time, it wasn't until a short while ago I saw John again.

He had only eight short words to say to me.

"Why couldn't you have done that in school?"



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