

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for inviting me to your meeting this afternoon. I know most of you, so it's like talking to a group of friends.

As you know, I work as a court reporter for Iowa's First Judicial District, which is the northeast Iowa area.

I'm going to give you a general overview of the four main areas of specialty in the court reporting profession, which are CART (or computer-aided realtime translation), captioning, freelance reporting, and official reporting. Each specialty is unique and requires different equipment and expertise.

I'll begin with the first one I mentioned, which is CART reporting.

CART

As I mentioned, "CART" is the acronym for "computer-aided realtime translation." Court reporters who provide this service usually work in a classroom setting, where they provide instant, or realtime, translation of class lectures to hearing-impaired students. The reporter attends all the classes with the student, and everything that is said in class is written by the reporter to a writer such as I have here, and it is instantly translated into English onto the computer screen. The student is able to take notes from the screen, while at the same time observing the interaction in the classroom.

CART reporters may also provide their services at conventions, corporate meetings, public hearings, church services, and even job interviews for hearing-impaired persons. I have provided some CART reporting, although on a very limited basis. I assisted a hearing-impaired woman during both her first and second job interviews for the position of computer programmer at a corporation in Iowa City a few years ago.

I also provided realtime reporting for a public hearing on new railroad legislation, which was held by Senator Grassley in Waterloo. It was a little unnerving, though, when the TV camera man came up beside me and stuck the camera over my shoulder to zero in on my fingers while I was writing Senator Grassley's speech.

My most difficult CART experience was a two-day convention on Aesthetics and Infrastructure at Hawkeye Community College. My contact person at the college neglected to tell me that two of the speakers were landscape artists who would be talking about the different plants used in public landscaping, referring to the plants by their Latin names. So here I was, writing a lot of what appeared to be nonsensical words, and it was on a huge screen at the front of the auditorium. I quickly switched over to what we call phonetic mode, where the words come up as they sound, not as they are actually spelled. That way, at least the hearing-impaired

persons watching the screen could figure out from the phonetic spelling what the words were.

CAPTIONING

Another area of court reporting is the field of captioning. This specialty has just exploded over the past few years, since new legislation requires all televised programs to be closed-captioned by the year 2006. The demand for captioning reporters is much higher than the supply at this point, so captioning companies are offering a lot of recruiting incentives right now. I personally know two reporters who provide closed captioning, and they both work from their homes.

They hook up their writer and computer to a special modem which sends the captioning to the TV station, where it is instantly synchronized with the live program. So, these reporters sit in front of their televisions and write what is being said on CNN, MSNBC, and so on. Their captions come across the bottom of the TV screen just a split second behind the spoken word.

I have never tried captioning, because I would need specialized software which is very expensive, but it is an ideal career for reporters who like to work at home, especially if they are parents with young children. They usually caption three to four hours a day, five days a week, and that is considered full time. Now, these hours may be from one to five a.m., depending on which time slot you have been hired to caption, but most of the time the captioning companies will work with you on what hours you work.

Holli Miller, who is one of the captioners I know, had the incredible experience of captioning for CNN at the time of the attack on the Twin Towers on the morning of September 11. Holli said it was so hard to concentrate on her captioning, when right in front of her, on the TV, she watched the planes fly into the World Trade Center buildings.

That morning, because of the mass power outages in New York as a result of the attack, CNN was not able to get another captioner hooked up to relieve Holli, so she captioned the event live for 12 hours straight before another captioner was able to get hooked up through their modem and take over for her. Holli said the biggest problem was bathroom breaks. She would have to jump up while they were showing a rerun of the attack, use the restroom, and run back to resume captioning.

Another problem arose when her husband brought her little girl home from day care, and Holli was still captioning in the living room. Her little girl couldn't understand why Mommy wouldn't talk to her, when it looked to her little girl like she was just sitting there, watching TV. Holli received national recognition for her service during that broadcast.

FREELANCE REPORTING

Freelance reporting encompasses all reporting which is done before a case goes to trial. Depositions make up the largest portion of freelance work. A deposition is testimony under oath, just as if the witness was in the courtroom, but it generally takes place in a more informal setting, such as an attorney's office. The purpose of a deposition is to find out what the witness knows and what they will say during the trial.

With freelance reporting, you need to be able to be very flexible with your schedule, because many depositions take place at night or on weekends, when it is convenient for the witness. You also may be called down to the police station in the middle of the night to report a sworn statement. Fortunately, that is a rare occurrence and usually only happens in the capital cases, such as murder, kidnapping or rape.

I worked as a freelance reporter for 16 years before going back to work at the courthouse, and one of the other types of reporting we would do was teacher termination hearings. Because these were held before the school board, these hearings were almost always held in the evenings, and we would typically be there until the wee hours of the morning. The longest teacher termination hearing I reported was in Cedar Falls, where we started at 1:00 in the afternoon and finally finished at 3:00 the next morning, working 14 hours straight.

One of my favorite stories about freelance reporting happened to my previous boss, Dwight Van Wyngarden. He was at an attorney's office, reporting a deposition, and the attorneys decided to take a five-minute break. Dwight left the room and went to get a cup of coffee. When he returned to the deposition room, he opened the door, and the attorneys and witness had started back up with the deposition without him. Dwight just looked at them and said, "Forgetting someone?" Needless to say, the attorneys were rather embarrassed when they realized they had forgotten that the court reporter wasn't even there to make the record.

As a freelance reporter, you sometimes find yourself in rather unusual situations. One time, I was reporting a deposition at the county attorney's office in Waterloo, and the witness was a woman with a two-year-old girl. The little girl was in the room during the deposition, and she was walking around, drinking out of her juice box. When she decided she didn't want any more juice, she came over and placed it in my paper tray while I was trying to report her mother's testimony. I quickly grabbed the box out of the tray and placed it on the table. Then the little girl became fascinated by my writer, so she climbed into my lap and tried to write on the keyboard.

Another incident caused me to be incarcerated, at least for a brief period of time. I was at the Black Hawk County Jail, in the library, where we were taking the deposition of a convicted murderer who had information regarding another case. The attorneys decided to take a quick break, and they both went out in the hall. I

stayed in the library with the witness. The next thing I know, there is a loud alarm sounding, and the whole jail immediately went into lockdown. I was locked in the library with this convicted murderer. Just when I was starting to panic about what could happen to me, the attorneys were able to flag down a deputy to unlock the door and let me out.

OFFICIAL REPORTING

The final area of specialty in court reporting is what I do now, which is official reporting, or judicial reporting. How many of you have ever served on a jury? Were you selected as a final juror on the trial? As you were sitting as a juror on the trial, you may have noticed the court reporter in the courtroom. The reporters who work in the courtroom, reporting trials and hearings, are called official reporters. We work for one or more judges, and we go wherever the judge goes.

I work with two judges, Jeffrey Harris and Todd Geer, both from Grundy Center. We cover 11 counties in northeast Iowa, but we spend most of our time in Waterloo.

Beth Wright and I job share, which means we switch between the two judges every week. This week, I am working with Judge Harris, who is a district associate judge. He handles criminal misdemeanor cases, civil cases under \$5,000, and juvenile cases. Next week, I will be working with Judge Geer, who is a district court judge. He handles criminal felony cases, civil cases over \$5,000, divorces, and probate matters, which usually involve will disputes.

Beth and I job share to give us more variety of cases to report, and it helps us share the load so that one reporter doesn't get too buried under with appeal transcripts, which we work on at night and on weekends.

The official reporter is referred to as the "guardian of the record." It is our responsibility to report verbatim -- in other words, exactly word for word -- everything that is said in the courtroom.

We are also in charge of all exhibits, which means that we have to secure weapons, bloody clothing, autopsy photos, drugs, needles, the chemicals used in manufacturing drugs -- any exhibits that were introduced in the trial.

The official reporter also drafts the jury instructions, which is the law that the judge gives to the jury at the end of the trial. So, we have to stay on top of the latest case law from both the Iowa appellate courts and the U.S. Supreme Court.

Of course, unusual things happen in the courtroom, also, as you can imagine. About a year ago, I reported a trial involving a civil commitment of a man who was accused of being a sexual predator. This is a fairly new law in Iowa, where the state brings a civil action against someone to keep them in prison after they have served their time, because they are too dangerous to be out on the street.

This particular defendant was in prison for committing three very brutal rapes, two of which involved very young girls. While the defendant was on the stand, answering questions from the prosecutor about his mental state, he looked at me, smiled, and began to roll his tongue around like this (indicate). I could feel the hairs stand up on the back of my neck as the blood drained from my face. Fortunately, Judge Geer saw what was going on and called for a break so the defense attorney could get his client under control.

And years ago, when I worked for Judge Eastman, I was in a motions hearing. The two attorneys were very much at odds over a point of law, and their arguments escalated to the point where they were shouting at each other, both talking at the same time. I asked them to stop numerous times, and they just kept right on arguing. I threw my hands up in the air and told them they were off the record, but still they kept on arguing. Finally, out of desperation, I picked up a pad of steno paper and threw it at the counsel table. It landed with a loud thud in front of one of the attorneys, and they immediately stopped yelling and burst out laughing.

Now, whenever I see the one attorney in court, he comes up to me and says, "You're not going to throw anything at me today, are you?"

I've also learned to expect the unexpected, especially with Judge Geer, because you just never know what he's going to do. We were hearing a divorce case, and the parties had settled everything except who would get custody of the cat. Judge Geer couldn't believe that the whole thing came down to the cat, so he decided to do something a little unconventional to settle the dispute. He decided to auction the cat off to the highest bidder between the two parties.

Now, this cat was 13 years old, and this couple had bought it at a pet store for \$15 when it was a kitten. Judge Geer started the bidding at \$10 and went up by \$10 increments until the bidding reached \$400. He then started going up by \$25 increments, because each party just kept on bidding. The bidding finally stopped at \$800! For a 13-year-old cat! Go figure.

REALTIME DEMONSTRATION

Well, I think I've talked long enough. If I could have two volunteers, I'll give a real brief demonstration of what we call realtime reporting.

***Realtime demo. and sample of Braille transcript.**

***Sample of their names in steno.**