



Coordinator Pat Gardiner reflects on CTW's beginnings:

It was ten years ago when I first approached my pastor with the idea of realtiming a church service for the deaf/hard of hearing. Much to my surprise, he had already done some reading up on closed captioning and had watched it on his television. He thought it was a great idea and suggested we should do some research into it and go from there.

We really didn't know where to start, but then we were in touch with a few churches in the United States that were realtime captioning their church services and they gave us some very helpful ideas. As Milton is a deaf community and wants to be a role model to other deaf communities, we wanted to participate in this community effort. We thought it would be best to have a live video coming up on television screens suspended from the church ceiling with the words coming up at the bottom of the screen so people could see faces and lips as well as the words. □

As we were researching all of this, I set up my writer and laptop at the front of the church and wrote just for myself, building my dictionary and just getting used to the fact that one day the whole congregation may be watching my captions! At that point I had only realtimed a few times and it was for only one or two people watching at a time.

The research and my practising went on for about two years and then we decided we were ready. We knew which software program we wanted to use and I felt more confident about my writing. The pastor and I took it to the Board of the church and they thought it was a good idea. The church bought the program and the equipment, and we were up and running. David Mainse from Crossroads came as a guest pastor one Sunday, was so impressed with the captioning that he did an interview with his camera man and it aired on the television program "100 Huntley Street" the following week across Canada and some parts of the United States. We thought we were really on our way!

I had been captioning our church service every Sunday morning for about two months, and then disaster seemed to strike. Two fingers on my left hand started to feel awkward. At first we

thought it was just tired fingers, but they continued to get worse. Then within a month they progressed to the point where, when I went to touch my writer, the two fingers curled inward and I could no longer write even one stroke! I went to doctor after doctor, but there was nothing they could do. There was no pain, the problem was deep and they doubted if I would ever write again. We have now found out the problem is due to a hereditary problem in my neck which has caused a condition called focal dystonia. After all that practising and the church spending nearly \$10,000.00 on equipment, I was devastated. What was I going to do? My dream had been dashed. It seemed like a total failure, but was it?

No, God had another plan. He brought triumph out of tragedy. One morning after months of crying and praying I woke up and knew what must be done. Over the next few months I asked court reporters I had worked with over the years if they would come and help us out and a highly skilled and dedicated team of captioners was built.

The team now consists of seven people: Denise Agard, Joanne Anderson, Diane LeBlanc, Caroline Sebastian, Kathy Toy, Terry Wood and myself who coordinates the team. In addition, our team consists of our church broadcast technician (who happens to be deaf in one ear), and my son who is our camera man. We even have our own chef, my husband, who makes sure lunch is ready for any of the team who may be able to stay after the service. Lunch gives us a chance to share our ideas on how to make the team and what we are doing for the church more effective. It also gives us time to get to know each other better.

Our team has become like a little family, but a family that always welcomes a newcomer. We now even have an A/B box where we can pair someone up who is just learning with one of the captioners and they can write the songs for the church service, something that is slower, but will help build confidence. We look out for each other, we hold each other up. If one of the captioners cannot make it on a Sunday, we help each other out.

We all come from different denominations: Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Jewish, Lutheran, Pentecostal, and United. The religious walls have come down and we have all joined together to be a part of something that is being done for the very first time in Canada.

Even after seven and a half years of this team captioning every Sunday morning service at New Life, it still brings tears to my eyes as I look up at the television screens and see the captions. I thought I would never again see captions in our church, but God has changed what seemed like an impossible situation into something wonderful. Without this very special group of people, it

would not have happened.

Our whole team watch in amazement as deaf/hard of hearing either come up to us or the pastor after a church service, sometimes with tears in their eyes, thanking us for that sermon that they were able to "hear" that came just on the very day they needed to hear it or maybe it is the very first time they have been able to participate in a church service with the rest of their family members who are all able to hear. Our hearts can't help but be touched. We really are contributing, making a difference and at the same enjoying what we are doing.