

THE LONG JOURNEY TO REALTIME CAPTIONING

- by Michael Cornwall

Watching the students from the Caribbean Centre For The Deaf at our Keswick Convention in Mandeville, Jamaica have the service interpreted by a competent ASL interpreter welled in me the desire to learn ASL. I was in my teens and, truth be told, it was just one of those moments where you think, "That looks neat. I wish I could do that."

I never pursued my desire to learn ASL, although I am planning to start classes by September next year, and had no idea that I would ever get to work with anyone with hearing loss. Pitman Shorthand was a passion for me and it never occurred to me that sitting in church taking the sermons with my pen in hand and notebook on my knee, then going home and reading my outlines to make sure I was writing facile outlines was a wonderful training ground on a journey that I did not realize had begun into realtime captioning.

In 1989 I arrived in Toronto, Canada to study court reporting at the George Brown College of Applied Arts and Technology. Realtime captioning was not in my plans. Indeed, apart from hearing about and reading articles in the *National Shorthand Reporter* magazine, as it then was, and the *Journal of Court Reporting*, I had no idea that this was something that was a fulfilling career path, and the articles only served to enlighten me on what was happening in the profession, but they did not give me any "buzz" about captioning. Getting through college was all that was on my mind.

Having purchased my CAT software in 1983, I embarked on the road to building my dictionary. Watching greats like Valerie Waite writing on the machine with what to my mind was absolute perfection did little to boost my ego that I would one day be able to caption.

When I met Mark Kislingbury at the Orlando Convention in 1997, I had no idea that somehow he would be instrumental in getting me interested in captioning. I watched Mark's writing and thought, "I wish I could do that." Spending time with Mark at the conventions helped me to realize that he was just a cool guy who practised a lot, and I started putting more effort into perfecting my writing and practice.

In 1997 I started to work at the Superior Court of Justice in Toronto and embarked on just writing hooked up to my laptop to see what my translation rate was. Having the pleasure of working with a hearing-impaired judge and outputting to lawyers gave me confidence that not only had I learnt a lot through the seminars at NCRA conventions and the court reporters with whom I had associated over the years, I was beginning to see an increase in appreciation from judges and lawyers for the service.

Writing realtime for oneself is one thing; writing so that judges and lawyers can see your writing can be a daunting task. I have discovered that the first

realtime job is usually the hardest, because you wonder if you would ever stop your hands from shaking while capturing a verbatim record. My journey into realtime and realtime captioning has taught me one thing: there must be a desire to constantly kill the 'conflict monster' from your writing and one must constantly review one's dictionary.

I moved to Ajax, Ontario, in October 2000 and little did I know that I was coming to Ajax to caption services for three hard-of-hearing individuals at Southside Worship Centre. Reggie and I had become bus buddies. He was studying at Ryerson University and we met on the bus each day and chatted. He attended Southside, and since I had not established myself in a faith community in Ajax, I decided to take up his kind invitation to attend church. What's more, he was going to pick me up from my driveway, so I thought that there was no reason I shouldn't go. However, Reggie forgot to pick me up and I took a cab to Southside that morning. We constantly laugh at this, because I now travel to Southside with Reggie and his wife Dianne on Sundays.

After being at Southside for a few weeks, I noticed that there were people in the front rows "signing" but it was "their business" as I was at Southside to worship. Without knowing, Pastor Jason, the associate pastor at Southside Worship Centre, had contacted Pat Gardiner at the New Life Church in Milton, Ontario, to learn what it would take to get captioning done at Southside. It

seemed as though it was not going to be a reality as Pastor Jason discovered that finding realtime captioners or CART providers was going to be very difficult.

One Sunday after Church, I approached the senior pastor, Pastor Dwight, to let him know that I was a court reporter and that I noticed there was no provision for either ASL or captioning for the three hearing-impaired members of the congregation, but if the church was interested to invest in the technology, I would provide captioning at no cost to the three members. In flew Mark Kislingbury, to the rescue. Looking back at how I got into captioning, I now realize that meeting Mark in Orlando was a part of a broader divine plan for Southside. Mark came to caption our first service, and then it hit me at the end of the service: What are you getting yourself into? Imagine trying to caption a service after Mark Kislingbury has captioned in your church! What was more, I had never captioned for a congregation before, and Pastor Dwight is not an “easy act” to follow.

I still joke that I am trying to warm up when Pastor Dwight is through with his sermons, but he has become more conscious of the captioning and we are able to laugh at my wanting to write faster than he can speak.

Our captioning started at Southside in the summer of 2001 and it has been a humbling experience. In the beginning I used to leave, sweating buckets, just from the thought that everyone was reading my every stroke. Now that we

have had captioning for two years at Southside, the congregation is more forgiving of my mistakes, but the hearing-impaired members are so delighted with the captioning that getting a hug or a smile or a hug and whisper from Margie and Joan and a “thank you” is all the reward necessary to return to caption the next Sunday.

At present we do not have a “back-up captioner”, so when I am not at church the captioning is not provided. The church is presently upgrading its equipment to allow for PowerPoint and captioning output from one computer and all I will need to do is bring my software key to church. It has been an exciting journey getting into captioning. Never in my wildest dreams did I think it could be so fulfilling, and there are times when I would like to grab my machine and dart from the service. When we have a new speaker and I have no idea what the sermon is going to be on, it presents a challenge. We have ironed out most of the kinks and there is a wider appreciation of what captioning is and how our hearing-impaired members are benefiting from the provision of such service.

Embarking on realtime captioning was scary. Getting involved is one of the most fulfilling aspects of my life as a verbatim reporter, and although the jury is still out on whether or not I want to embark on captioning full-time, I constantly strive to give excellent captions on Sundays which I have found to be improving my writing for reporting in court during the week. I do not have the option to slow Pastor Dwight down if he gets into one of his rapid fires, as I am able to do in

court, but he has become more understanding, especially when the odd Greek or Hebrew word or unusual name pops into his sermon and he is sure that I do not have it in my dictionary.

We hope to keep on growing at Southside, and our desire is to get more people helping with captioning. Captioning is fulfilling and, as Monette Benoit said in one of her articles, I trust more reporters will now start looking into the possibility of providing this service to members of our community who will rely on our fingers for their hearing.

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Outlines:

A Sampling of Monette Benoit's Religious Brief Forms

Please stand	PAEPBD
Please kneel	PAELD
Bow your heads	PWOURDZ
Jesus Christ	SKWR –F
Let us pray	HROIRP
Holy Spirit	H –S
Holy Ghost	H –G
Virgin Mary	SR –PL
Religion(s)	R –PB(S)
Religious	R – PBLG
Heaven	HAEFPB
Pontius Pilate	P – P
Sacrament(s)	SAERPLT(S)
Sacrifice	SAERBG

Catholic(s)	KAERT(S)
Methodist(s)	PHE –PLD(Z)
Presbyterian(s)	PRAEPB(S)
Baptist(s)	PWAEPT(S)
Lutheran(s)	HRAOURT(S)
Pentecostal(s)	PAERPBL(S)
Almighty	AUPLT
Almighty father	AUFPL
Blessed	PW –LD
Blessing	PW –LG
The mass is ended, go in peace PHAEZ TKPWOEP	

Monette Benoit

www.CRRBooks.com

author, The CAPTIONIZER Series, Seven Volumes, to include The Universal Religions, 40+ plus words you can hear and see, while enhancing your skills and expanding your dictionary