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When the burnout hits, it hits hard. After six years as an insurance account manager, that burnout came with a vengeance. Years of being yelled at—both over the phone and in person—delivering difficult news to people during some of the lowest moments of their lives, and working while chronically understaffed, eventually overshadowed all the good I had accomplished. I knew I was ready for a change, even if I didn't yet know what that change would be.

I started reflecting on my interests. While moving my family to Hollywood to pursue my dream of becoming a famous actress felt a bit unrealistic, something else stood out: my AP Government class during my senior year of high school. My teacher was exceptional and sparked a deep interest in the court system. As part of the class, we attended a court hearing, and I remember being completely fascinated. That feeling never went away.

The next question was how to make that interest a reality. I never felt I was smart enough to be a lawyer, nor did I believe I could take on law school with everything else going on in my life. Around that time, coworkers often commented on how fast I typed. Data entry and typing had always been the most enjoyable parts of my workday. That's when something clicked—court reporting.

I began researching and reached out to a local court reporter. Through the Pennington County Courthouse website, I found an email for court reporter Kim Johnson and sent her a message explaining my interest. Even though we had never met, Kim graciously responded and offered to meet with me. She showed me the machine, explained the profession, and introduced me to the opportunities available. Kim and Teresa Benson also told me about the A-to-Z program, even lending me a machine so I could try it myself.

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After completing the A-to-Z program, I knew this was the career path I wanted to pursue. I researched schools and requirements, including the significant practice hours needed for speed building. While it felt daunting to balance school, work, and family, my family's support encouraged me to believe it might be possible.

Then one day, Kim emailed me about an opening in the Clerk's Office. I applied immediately and was transparent about my goal of becoming a court reporter during my interview. A few days later, I received a call offering me a position as a court recorder. Once I learned the role didn't involve direct public interaction, I knew it was the right fit.

My first day was March 4, 2024, and I haven't looked back. The CourtSmart system was easy to learn, my coworkers were incredibly supportive, and for the first time in years, I was genuinely excited to go to work. That excitement hasn't faded. I've since begun my schooling and continue to receive unwavering support as I work toward my goals. I've learned so much about the justice system, and I'm deeply grateful to everyone who opened doors for me and helped set me on this path.

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