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I didn't know much about the town of Sturgis, South Dakota before December 2, 2013, when I started my first day at the courthouse as an official court reporter.

Nestled in the quaint little town, I made my way into the courthouse and was welcomed warmly by a beautiful plant on my desk and a map of South Dakota with the town of Sturgis circled saying, "Welcome to your new home."

My uplifting welcome was quickly replaced by nerves as my hands shook as I set out to tackle my first eight-hour criminal day in court. I was quickly brought back to memories of trying to pass speed tests in school as I struggled to tackle different speakers at a fast pace and trying to remember who it was that was speaking.

As that first day concluded, I went home feeling not only defeated, but also unprepared. I called my mom that night seeking advice and encouragement.

It was then that I knew the only choice I had was to think about all of the accomplishments I had made so far leading up to this day. I was brought back to the first day of theory class when I was unaccustomed to the machine sitting in front of me. It would take me 10 minutes to set up my machine and feed the paper through it. Yes, those were the days when we wrote with paper. I spent countless nights in class just trying to read back what first looked like a bunch of random letters on paper.

But quickly, those 'random letters on paper' turned into words that became easier to read back over time as I mastered theory class. I was forever changed by learning what seemed to be a new language. I found that in conversing with people, I would imagine myself typing what they were saying in my head. I had no idea how ingrained all of that would become in me.

WHY I CHOSE COURT REPORTING

My celebration of mastering theory didn't last long and next thing I knew, I was thrown into speed building. I spent many nights at home, outside of class, with my machine tucked snugly in front of me. I pushed myself to memorize new steno briefs to shorten words and phrases in hopes to type faster and pass one more test.

After three long years of schooling, the day I'd been anticipating since my first night in theory class came when I found out the news that I'd passed my final speed test. That same night my teacher handed me a job application, with a huge smile on her face, for an official court reporter in Sturgis.

The idea of landing a job so soon after finishing schooling seemed so far-fetched at that point, as I'd had minimal training in court. My doubtfulness of landing the job was put to rest when, after a few long weeks of waiting and one job interview via ITV, I was offered the job.

Two and a half years later, I have a pocket full of stories of mishaps that I've overcome. I've blossomed as an individual and as a court reporter in my profession because of this job.

I've been put to the test every day and faced a new set of challenges that I've grown from immensely. That's the wonderful thing about court reporting. It is not an exaggeration to say that we are learning new things every day.

I feel accomplished when I finish a jury trial, knowing I played an important role. I wasn't the one sitting at the judge's desk ruling on important decisions, and I wasn't representing a defendant fighting for their freedom. I was behind my machine typing every word that was said. I am the 'keeper of the record.'

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Today I look back at the wide-eyed 22-year-old woman who walked into the courthouse that day in December of 2013 and I can't help but smile as I do every day now going to work. I know I will still have challenges ahead of me in my career, but I know now that I have the tools I need to navigate my way through this crazy and rewarding career.

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