



The Exemplar

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From the Editor



By Thomas Grogan; FDE; Class of 2005
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All good things must come to an end. In this case, I hope not an end but rather a sabbatical. This will be my last issue serving as Editor in Chief. A few months ago, an area of activity that appeared in early 2006 has now shown indications of growing. I have now entered my third battle with Lymphoma. As with the previous fights, I fully intend to win this one. But in order to do so, it is vitally important for a lot of my focus to be concentrated in taking care of myself. Not only physically but also mentally, emotionally and spiritually. I will continue to accept clients and conduct business as a certified forensic document examiner and handwriting expert, but I will regulate how much work load I take on. God willing, I will back in your midst again soon. So my last message is the same as it has always been for anyone. Live everyday as if it were your last, one day you will be right. Take care and good luck!

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A First for Everything.



By Linda Hodges, FDE; Class of 2008
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Everyone has a list of firsts. As a child we remember a first haircut, a first black eye, and a first kiss. These are all memorable events. As we grow up, our list of firsts becomes more meaningful. Things like a first child, a first home, and a first vacation.

As a forensic document examiner, there is also a list of firsts. The first case, the first time you are on the witness stand, the first interview with the news media. I have experienced two of those three firsts in the past 2 months, and I would like to share my experiences.

On Jan 31, I received a call from a gentleman in SC, who wanted my services as an FDE. He promptly mailed me a check and the documents. Two days later I am digging into the case with my mentor, Bob Baier, only to find I need more info. Back to the client I go, feeling a bit unsure of myself. The call was amazingly simple & he agreed to send me more exemplars. Well to make a long story short, there were more phone calls between Bob & me, as well as the client & me. And on March 1st I had made my decision. Bob agreed with my decision, and now I was able to call my client. He was glad to know I had a decision, and has moved forward with his next step. He called me back about an hour after we talked & has written me another check for my written opinion.

Now I want to tell you about my first interview. I met a reporter at a Girl Scout function, & gave her my card. She said wow, what is a Forensic Document Examiner? I beamed as I told her about my newfound career. "I analyze signatures and other writing and can tell if they are authentic or a forgery." I told her if she ever wanted to do a story on it, to call me. That was on Feb 3. I thought nothing more of the comment after I said it.

Around the middle of Feb, the reporter calls me and says she wants to do a story on Forensic Document Examination. We scheduled an appointment to meet, and I thought I mentally prepared for the questions I knew I had to answer.

- How did I come to be a Forensic Document Examiner?
- What does it take to be one?
- What do you like about being one?
- What is the best part?

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- How do you know if it is a forgery or not?
- What kinds of documents do you examine?
- What kind of tests do you perform?

To be put on the spot like that was a bit of a wake up call. I know what we do; I know how to do it. What I wasn't so up to par on was answering the questions, as I would have liked to. I guess it is like someone on a game show, when they can't answer the simplest question when put on the spot, but they really know the answer, it just won't come to them.

After reading my interview, I have decided to write down the questions that were asked and write down my answers, and then practice, like an actress studying her lines. I want to improve my answers and have them become second nature.

This interview was a good thing in that it got my name out to the community. It also showed me where I need to improve. And finally it showed me I am not ready for my first time on the witness stand.

Don't believe everything you think



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I took Ethics in college and have to say it was one of my most intellectually stimulating, thought provoking, life-changing experiences much like our continual study of the profession of Document Examining. With that said I doubt that this article will have that kind of impact on anyone, although I do hope it gives you pause.

I find that we are thrust into many ethical dilemmas in the search for truth, but, who's truth? Is it the truth that is bought and paid for by a client? Is it the truth because we say it is the truth? Our opinion does not make it the truth. Is it the truth because we believe it to be the truth? Is our faith in our opinion to be questioned? Should it be questioned by us? Is "the truth" a commodity? Is the truth subject to ethical relativism? And if so, have we then wholesaled the truth for our own means? There are an infinite amount of ethical questions that we will ponder in the course of our experience as a document examiner. And I believe nothing is more important than the foundation upon which we build our careers and the ethical philosophy we adhere to.

The study of ethics itself is a study of power, might, right, and truth. Power

can be derived from might, I am bigger than you so I am right and what I say is the truth because I can hurt you. Might can be attained through political power, power handed over by the masses to be governed and regulated. It can be attained through financial means, I need that paycheck so I will give them power over me. Authoritative power would be power that parents have over children or police have over citizens. We have acknowledged that there is power over us and we are to submit to some extent. All forms of power will decide right and truth. Not based on what is right or what is true, but based on what is in the best interest of the "power".

Although we can agree, an ideal world would be a simple world where the truth is known by all to be "the truth". That is not to be, here on earth. We must judge what is true based on many complicating factors. We must not let our ego lead us to a conclusion that we believe because we want to be right. We must question ourselves at every step if we are to stay true to the pursuit of truth. If not us, then who, I ask? If we do not preserve the sanctity of truth for truth's sake then are we all not forsaken? When you work in a system are you not responsible for the rise or fall of it based on your part of the equation? I think we are. If you are not part of the solution then are you not part of the problem?

Any case where you render an opinion should be held to a strict standard. Practice makes perfect but imperfect practice makes an imperfect product. Whether you are rendering an opinion on homework cases or your cases, each case must be given the utmost care in the search for truth. I think it is imperative that you put yourself in the shoes of the accused and ask, "Do I have enough evidence in this case to convict myself". I have had cases where the evidence was small but mighty, and this is precisely what makes our jobs challenging yet rewarding. We can find the needle in the haystack and that is all we need. But let us not get lazy and egotistical and disrespect the value of the truth. There are always two sides but there is only one truth in our business. Someday our life or someone else's may depend on it.

If you have cases in class that have two opposing opinions realize that only one of you is right. Check your ego at the door. Like my daddy always said, "Don't believe everything you think". We are here to learn and learn from each other. Teachers can learn and Students can teach. Open your mind to the reality that someone is wrong and the possibility that it could be any one of us at any given time. One truth we know is that we are not perfect and we make mistakes. We also can interpret the same information differently and come to a different conclusion. An ill health tremor is different from the "tremor of fraud" but could they be confused by an ethical document examiner? Absolutely, they could. This field takes practice, practice, practice. It is not a two year study, it is a life study.

No ethical person wants to be on the wrong side of truth. Do you want to be on the wrong side? Do you want to render opinions that are based on not what is true, but based on what you saw? But you quit too soon and looked no further, only then to have missed "the truth"? Right there in black and white, staring up at you and looking like a jar of mayo. This is not like looking for the mayo in the refrigerator. You tell your spouse it isn't there because you can't see it. What you can't see is still there, just like the jar of mayo right in front of your nose. I think the truth is not "the truth according to me", but the truth for truth's sake. Let us all go forth and multiply if we are committed to the pursuit of truth. If not, let us be barren until we learn better ways.

Kudos

Have you gotten a big high profile case in your area? Have you been court qualified? Presented a seminar in a public venue? Been recognized on TV or the radio?

LET US KNOW! There's nothing like success to help inspire and motivate others. If these people can do it, so can you. Keep it up! Congrats.

Thanks from the Editor

Big thanks to my dear friend, Anna Ryder, for assisting me in putting this issue together. I couldn't have done it without you. I greatly appreciate your continued support and invaluable help. Thanks! -Thom