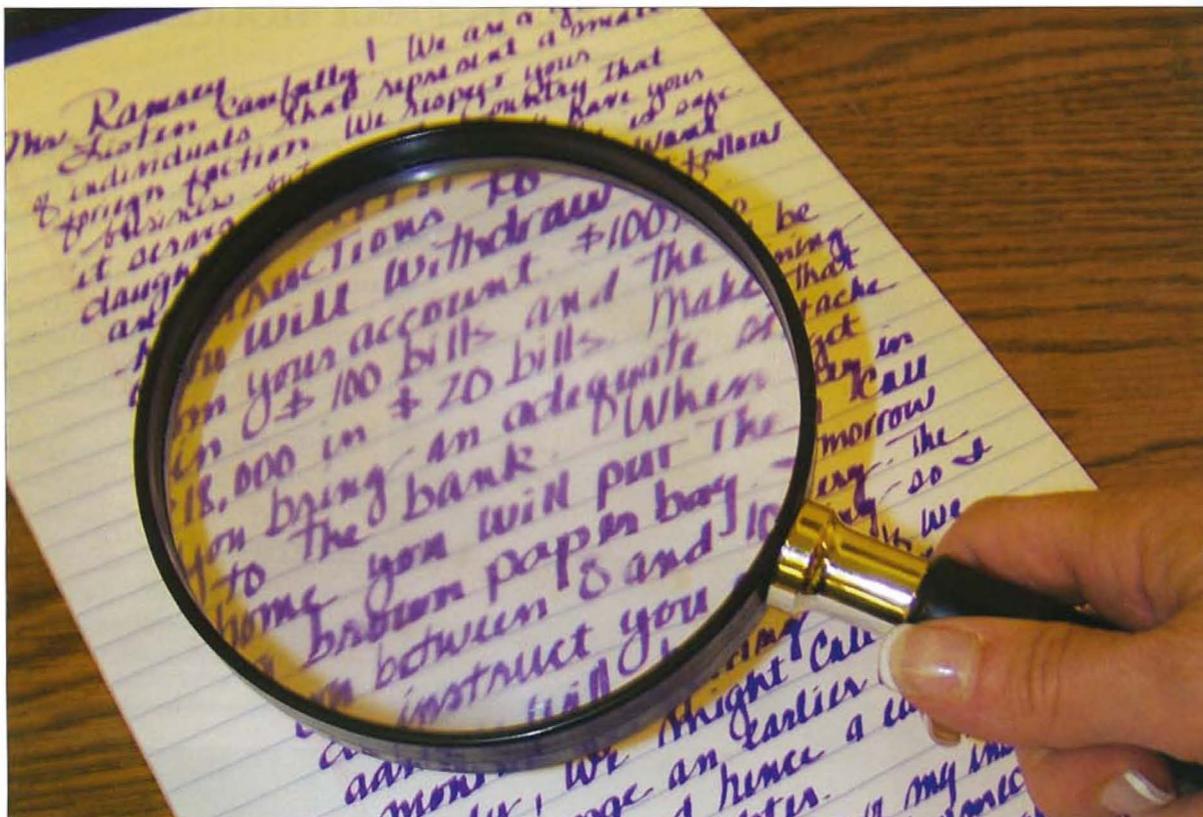


PEN AND TELLER



Expert analyzes letters of the law

BY DEBRA TALCOTT

Using handwriting analysis to solve a legal case is not just the stuff of made-for-TV movies. Just ask Ruth Holmes, owner of Pentec, Inc., the forensic and personnel consulting firm she operates in Bloomfield Hills.

"There are two distinct areas that entail handwriting in the legal arena," says Holmes. "One is document examination for authenticity and establishing the identity of the writer. The other is handwriting evaluation for personality used in jury and trial consulting."

Holmes says the American media, in their quest for information, tends to blend these two areas of handwriting expertise in coverage of well-known cases such as the anthrax letters, the Jon Benet Ramsey ransom note, and the multiple identities of Clark Rockefeller, the Boston man charged

recently with kidnapping his daughter. Since Holmes works in both document examination and handwriting evaluation, she refers to herself as a handwriting "examiner."

Holmes, who has provided her expertise on a vast number of cases over the last 25 years, first served as an expert witness in 1986, after completing a 3-year apprenticeship with a court-qualified document examiner. She is certified by the National Association of Document Examiners (NADE) and the American Board of Forensic Examiners (ABFE). In 2002 Holmes

was accepted for membership in the Michigan-Ontario Identification Association (MOIA), a division of the International Association of Identification (IAI).

Attorneys and law enforcement agencies seek the forensic services of a handwriting examiner when they need to authenticate a signature, writing, or numbers that appear on documents that are in question such as forged checks, wills, deeds, contracts, stock transfers, or beneficiary forms. Police cases often involve identifying persons responsible for bomb threats, drug records, anonymous letters, prison notes, suicide annotations, car paper fraud, and graffiti. Employers in the business sector might consult a handwriting examiner to verify signatures, dates, and figures on documents such as employment appli-

cations, non-compete agreements, time cards, work contracts, and offensive personal notes that might be deemed harassment of one employee by another.

Jury selection is another area in which a handwriting examiner is often consulted.

"Attorneys take an oath to do whatever they can to assist their clients," says Holmes. "Many are now turning to handwriting examiners to help them evaluate cases and the potential jurors who hear those cases."

Starting as soon as with the pre-trial focus groups, Holmes says that when written questionnaires are available, a handwriting examiner can identify the jurors who will likely become the leaders, the followers, or the "wild cards" that can either assist the jury in reaching a verdict or, conversely, impede the process. Identifying those jurors who are open-minded, generous, and sympathetic as opposed to those who may be opinionated, judgmental, and unemotional is equally important. She works for both prosecution and defense.

"We are auditory learners, so assistance in preparing trial graphics can also be useful for attorneys," explains Holmes, noting that once the jury is seated, a handwriting examiner can continue to provide service to the legal team.

The handwriting examiner provides insight into the character of a person by studying the space, form, and movement of a person's handwriting. The examiner makes an assessment then communicates that information to the attorney who is looking to seat the fairest jury for his or her client.

"I have been privileged to work with many gifted attorneys and law enforcement officers over the last three decades," says Holmes. "Many of these dedicated lawyers are in the Prosecutors' Offices of Oakland, Macomb, and Wayne Counties. Behind them all are the investigators, sheriff and police departments, and the forensic teams that collect and provide the documents for examination," she explains.

In the highly publicized cases of Dr. Jack Kevorkian, for whom she worked as jury consultant for five trials, Holmes had the opportunity to work with notable Southfield attorney Mike Morganroth.

"Working the last 12 years with Mike Morganroth, who never, ever, gave up on this man, I have witnessed law practiced at the highest level of integrity," Holmes says.

It was following the last trial resulting



Ruth Holmes welcomed daughter Sarah into her Bloomfield Hills business, Pentec, Inc., more than a decade ago. Mother and daughter are the second and third generations, respectively, to work as handwriting examiners for the legal and business sectors.

in Dr. Kevorkian's incarceration that Holmes experienced what she calls "one of the most meaningful friendships over the last decade." That occurred when Mick Wallace of "60 Minutes" began calling regularly because of his concern for Dr. Kevorkian, whose tape had been shown on his program and was used against the doctor in trial.

"Mike did everything he could to support Jack during more than eight years in prison and did not rest until he was there to greet him upon his release in June of 2007," says Holmes.

Based on the media calls that Holmes gets on a diverse number of handwriting issues and noting how the courtroom is

one of the most popular settings for the television audience, she agrees with Mike Wallace when he says that news is now entertainment. Holmes refers to Wallace as "one of the greatest television journalists of all time."

Another career highlight occurred when the late John F. Kennedy Jr. asked an assistant to "find Ruth Holmes."

"He wanted me to profile the 1996 presidential candidates for his new magazine called 'George,'" she remembers.

Profiles of such political heavyweights as Bill Clinton, Robert Dole, Patrick Buchanan, and Richard Lugar appeared in the March 1996 issue of the publication.

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HANDWRITING ANALYSIS



When working in the corporate setting, Holmes does not tell a human resource manager whom to hire. Likewise, when asked about the 2008 candidates, she says voters need to match the applicant to the job description and ask themselves what qualities they are looking for in the next president.

Asked for her assessment of the respective strengths of presidential hopefuls McCain and Obama, Holmes explains, "John McCain is a block printer, which indicates that he is assertive, analytical, and likes to be in control. He can be impatient with incompetence, but he values facts, figures, and objectivity."

"Barack Obama has a high form level of print-script writing, which indicates his intelligence, perceptiveness, and gift with words. Mentally gymnastic and diplomatic, he has the ability to defend his principles, solve problems, and bring people together," she explains.

When evaluating a sample of handwriting, Holmes observes space, form, and movement. She considers whether the writing is large or small, legible or neglected, and executed quickly or slowly.

"Lots of lawyers have illegible handwriting and signatures, but it is not necessarily

a negative characteristic," explains Holmes. "It can mean the brain is working faster than the hand can keep up with it. Many successful people have unreadable writing."

Asked what her own handwriting reveals about her, Holmes shares that the knot in her "t" indicates persistence, the strong downward strokes on her "y" and "g" indicate determination, and bold "t" bars indicate enthusiasm.

"The heavy pressure shows that my energy is usually undaunted in getting a job done and going the extra mile when necessary," she says.

Three zones of writing — the upper, middle, and low — are evaluated by handwriting examiners. The Upper Zone, consisting of tall letters, correlates with thinking, the mind, and intellect. The Middle Zone, consisting of small letters on the base line, correlates with feelings and the mundane. The Low Zone, consisting of letters that fall below the base line, pertains to sociability and action.

"In the corporate setting, a personnel department might use this information as part of the hiring or promoting process. In a law enforcement setting, this information might be used to compare the different zones and their proportions in or-

der to authenticate a signature," Holmes explains, emphasizing that these are two distinct areas of handwriting examination that require separate and specific training and expertise.

A portion of Holmes' training was at the hands of the late Felix Klein, a German handwriting and document examiner and his protégé, Roger Rubin, of New York City. Klein survived his internment in the Dachau concentration camp near Munich during World War II when he proved useful to the guards as a profiler.

"Roger Rubin said that 'anyone who studies a subject for one year is a novice, from one year to 10 years is a student, and beyond 10 years is a serious student.' In my 29th year of examining handwriting, I am still learning," says Holmes.

As a member of the International Women's Forum (IWF) and the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO), Holmes encourages younger women in running their own companies and actively participating in community service and politics.

Holmes credits clients, colleagues, and family members with the success and expansion of Pentec, Inc.

"I am married to Peter, a retired account executive, and we have two children who were born in Brussels, Belgium, where we lived for seven years," she says. "Before that assignment, we lived in the Ivory Coast for four years."

The couple's son, Nick, graduated from University of Michigan Law School in 2000 and now practices in New York City. Their daughter, Sarah, earned her master of arts in psychology from Boston University and joined Pentec as a handwriting and document examiner in 1997.

"Sarah is the third generation of examiners in our family and now operates an office near Boston," explains Holmes. "My mother, 95, a writer and researcher, is still using her knowledge of handwriting," she says.

Named one of "Michigan's 95 Most Powerful Women" by "Corp!" magazine in 2002, Holmes was honored to find herself in the company of such extraordinary women as Michigan Supreme Court Justice Marilyn Kelly and attorneys Denise Ilitch, Trudy Archer, and Jennifer Granholm, to name just a few.

"I do not think of myself as powerful so much as hard working, dedicated to what I do, enthusiastic about educating others, and grateful to those who have shared their knowledge with me," says Holmes. **M**