

The Landscape of the Mind



Handwritten letters have fanned love affairs, precipitated wars, formalized independence, emancipated slaves, and have charted and recorded the course of human history. When handwriting is studied and interpreted by professional examiners, the adage which states that the pen is mightier than the sword is more convincing than ever. Every movement of the pen—fast or slow, neat or messy, large or small—is a reflection of personality. The trail you leave in ink is as unique as your fingerprints and even more revealing of who you are.

Two well-known and highly respected graphologists are Colby-Sawyer alumnae Ruth Elliott Holmes '65 and her daughter, Sarah Holmes '95. Ruth is founder and president and Sarah is vice president of their company, Pentec, Inc., which is located in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and Waltham, Massachusetts.

Evidence of their company's success was seen in 1999 when Ruth was named one of Michigan's Top 10 Women Business Owners, and in 2002 when *Corp!* magazine listed her among "Michigan's 95 Most Powerful Women." Ruth is a certified document examiner (CDE), designated as such by the National Association of Document Examiners. She is court-qualified as an expert witness in federal, state, and local courts. From 1996 until 1999, Pentec received national and international attention by serving as trial consultants for Dr. Jack Kevorkian's defense team in his right-to-die campaign.

The Holmes's family interest in handwriting examination seems to have a genetic component since Sarah is the third generation in the family to study and work in the field. Handwriting and horses have been her passion, and she was honored to be a member of the 1994 National Championship equestrian team at Colby-Sawyer. Last May she graduated from

Boston University with a master's degree in psychology. Sarah is quick to point out that paper and ink have been of utmost importance throughout history. She notes that, from the earliest cave paintings, to hieroglyphics, to the development of alphabets and language, writing has played a significant role.

Handwriting examiners Ruth Elliott Holmes '65 and Sarah Holmes '95 explore trails of ink from courtrooms to corporations.

by David R. Morcom

Today it is no different as the media focus on such cases as the anthrax letters, the sniper letters, and the materials that are being discovered in the caves and file cabinets in the Middle East, all of which have a writing component.

On a daily basis, Ruth and Sarah advise individual, legal, and corporate clients in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. They work for corporate executives and the human resource departments of various businesses and organizations by studying handwriting samples and preparing personality profiles of the writers. The profiles can then be used as one of the tools in personnel selection, team building, and management assignments. The forensic aspect of their profession, which includes

determining the authenticity of signatures on documents or identifying a writer, is widely used by banks, financial institutions, police departments, attorneys, and private individuals. In addition to rendering expert testimony in court, Ruth and Sarah's skills are also utilized in their roles as jury and trial consultants.

"There really isn't a typical work day," Sarah explains, "but a busy day in the office might include preparing three or four verbal or written profiles for a company, photographing documents for a forgery or anonymous letter case, and lecturing to a group of human resource professionals."

"Part of the day might be spent going over juror questionnaires in preparation for jury selection or in advising an attorney on the most effective graphics and strategy to be used during a trial. The sheriff's department might call and ask Pentec



to examine and photograph documents related to solving a crime on anything from a missing person, to a school bomb threat, or to a murder-for-hire case. In addition to consulting with clients, Sarah finds time to serve as president of the Great Lakes Association of Handwriting Examiners, and Ruth is an active member of the International Women's Forum, an exclusive group of professional women.

When asked what she considers the favorite part of her work, Ruth answers without hesitation, "I like the change and variety. For example, I've worked with the well-known attorney Geoffrey Fieger, helped choose five juries for Dr. Jack Kevorkian, and been in the middle of the dialogues on the 'death with dignity' movement. This, in turn, has put me in direct contact with people in the media, so it's not unusual to pick up the phone and speak to someone like Mike Wallace or Barbara Walters. One day I could be giving a speech before a group of international businessmen in Las Vegas, and on another day I could be flying to Denver to choose a jury. I could be teleconferencing a management alignment in Kentucky one day, and the next day I could be preparing for an interview with *Dateline* or *Court TV*. I was even hired to spend two weeks in Egypt on the Nile River lecturing on handwriting and hieroglyphics to a group of industrialists and their wives. Because I speak French and Spanish, it allows me to work on cases all over the world. The diversity of subject matter and working with Sarah are what make the long hours I put in for Pentec so gratifying."

Stories relating to Ruth and her vocation have appeared in *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *George*, and *Time* magazine to name but a few, and while she considers this to be heady stuff, she knows there are those who question the tenets of handwriting analysis. Sarah feels some of the skepticism about their work comes from research on the subject that is methodologically flawed. "The conflicting findings fueled my fire to do my own study on handwriting analysis," she explains. "The title of my research is 'A Neuropsychological Investigation into the Validity of Handwriting Analysis.'" In simplified terms, the goal of Sarah's research is to explore the relationship between assessments of ten personality traits according to the psychological tests and the assessments made by the graphologists.

"We believe handwriting is language frozen in time," Sarah says. "We think of it as the landscape of the mind. It's brainwriting, not handwriting. Whether you write with your hand or foot or with a pen in your mouth, it's still coming from your brain, and there will be many similarities no matter what method you use to write. You can't disguise your handwriting, and the more you write the more your habitual traits will come through. When we analyze handwriting, some of



the things we study are space, form, movement, size, legibility, speed, letter connections, and pressure. We're also looking at zones. The upper zone is imagination, freedom, and creativity. The middle zone is the area of emotions. The lower zone is the area of materialistic and instinctual pleasures."

If you visit Pentec, Inc.'s Web site, www.handwritingexaminers.com, you will learn that "handwriting examination has long been used to detect forgeries, fraud, and the identity of writers of anonymous letters. More recently, handwriting evaluations are used to help identify talents and tensions of existing and prospective employees, recognize promotion potential, and resolve conflicts. Most important of

all, handwriting assessment is beneficial for personal growth and development."

Ruth and Sarah are proud alumnae of Colby-Sawyer College who, through their knowledge and research of handwriting, have made their marks, literally and figuratively, working as human archeologists exploring the landscape of the mind. They are fond of saying that people are like geodes which have yet to be opened. Most observers see geodes as rough, dull-colored stones, but Ruth and Sarah Holmes see people as the inside of the geode, for in the handwriting of their subjects they see sparkling, multi-faceted crystals waiting to be discovered. ■



Opposite page, center: For Ruth (on right), one of the joys of practicing her profession is working with her daughter, Sarah. Top of this page: Sarah's practiced and observant eye leaves little to chance when she is studying the "landscape of the mind." Center of this page: One of the interesting aspects of being a graphologist is studying the handwriting of people who are now, or who have been, major players on the world stage.