



## Words of the Dying: CHCH TV and Constable Garrett Styles Epilogue

Managing Producer Debbie Walker decided to include the audio of Constable Garrett Styles' dying words in the June 28, 2011 CHCH 6 p.m. newscast. The last-minute decision met with significant negative reaction. Reporter Cristina Tenaglia says viewers called and emailed the station to complain about how distasteful the decision was, and to accuse CHCH of sensationalizing a tragic story.<sup>1</sup>

CHCH News Director Mike Katrycz stood by Walker's decision. "It was a public transmission. Police perform a very public duty. Therefore, his communication is of public interest," comments Katrycz. "We all take an interest because the police are the people who protect us."<sup>2</sup> He believes it was doubly in the audience's interest to hear the tape: not only did it show how capable and conscientious Styles was, but it also demonstrated his concern for others even in death. "You can transcribe," says Katrycz. "But only by hearing will you understand... the genuine care he showed for people."

Katrycz did not worry that the broadcast might have sensationalized the story. "The reality is, unfortunately, the reality," he notes.

There is nothing that sensationalizes [police officer deaths]. It hits everybody right in the face. You can't sensationalize that. By their very nature they are sensational.

As to whether the broadcast caused harm to Styles' family, Katrycz explains: "These considerations don't necessarily rule the day."

Police Chief Eric Jolliffe was caught off-guard by the release of the transcript and audio recording of Styles' last words. Jolliffe filed a complaint with the Ontario Press Council accusing

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<sup>1</sup> Information from Carly Conway interview with Cristina Tenaglia in Toronto on September 21, 2011. All further quotes from Tenaglia, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

<sup>2</sup> Carly Conway interview with Michael Katrycz in Toronto on October 24, 2011. All further quotes from Katrycz, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

the *Toronto Star* (as well as the *Globe and Mail*) of violating journalistic ethics and breaching Section 9.2 of the Radiocommunication Act.<sup>3</sup> On October 18, 2011, however, the council dismissed the complaint on the grounds that published excerpts were sourced from the website, and therefore were already in the public domain. Don McCurdy, who spoke for the council, added that the articles were “clearly in the public interest, were accurate and had news value.”<sup>4</sup>

Jolliffe also wrote to RadioReference.com to charge that it had violated Section 9.2 of the Act by providing transmissions not authorized by the originating party, in this case the York Regional Police. The website responded that they were not “divulging the contents of [his] department’s communications” but rather “providing a broadcast platform that allows individual contributors and listeners access to live and archived public safety communications.”<sup>5</sup>

As of early 2012, RadioReference.com had no plans to disallow feeds from their platform. Jolliffe planned to take further steps to address the airing and publication of Styles’ last words.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For the full text of the Act, see: <http://www.ictregulationtoolkit.org/en/Publication.3285.html>

<sup>4</sup> “Reporting dying officer’s last words complaint turned down,” *CBC News*, October 18, 2011. See: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/story/2011/10/18/toronto-press-council.html>

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Jolliffe from RadioReference, October 8, 2011. See: <http://wiki.radioreference.com/images/f/fc/YorkRegionalResponse.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Information from Manori Ravindran telephone interview with Eric Jolliffe on October 25, 2011. All further quotes from Jolliffe, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.