

My phone buzzed at 11:12pm and the name on the screen was someone I did not expect to hear from at that hour. It was my buddy from the office, the one who always brings Timbits to the Friday meetings. His voice was small. He told me he had been stopped on Bovaird, the officer asked him to blow into a roadside screening device, and then things escalated fast. He was sitting in the back of a cruiser, not sure if he was under arrest, and he said three words that made my stomach drop: "I need a lawyer."

I told him I would come. I got dressed over the sound of my wife asking what was wrong, then drove out onto the 410 with the radio off, just thinking. The drive from Brampton felt longer than usual, the streetlights blurred into a slow string. When I arrived the Tim Hortons parking lot half a kilometre away became our planning room. He was released to me after a few hours; his eyes were bloodshot from lack of sleep more than anything else, but he kept saying he was worried about the evidence and what the police had done during the stop.

I knew nothing about this. I had never been to court. My whole criminal-law knowledge came from overheard conversations at a BBQ and a lot of frantic Googling. So I became the amateur research assistant for someone I cared about, staying up until the early hours with my laptop and my phone, reading things that sounded like they were written in another language.

What followed was a week of tiny revelations, each one more practical than the last. The part that kept coming up in the conversations with my buddy and the calls we made to friends, was evidence collection. Not "evidence" in the cinematic sense, but papers, notes, timestamps, breath test printouts, the officer's notes, anything that could later be requested from the Crown. It was boring in a law-school way, but also the thing that felt like it might matter the most.

First, the panic phase. Then, the checklist phase. And finally, the awkward phase where I had to ask strangers for favours I did not want to ask.

The first morning after the stop I Googled "impaired driving Toronto" sitting in the bathroom at work because I did not want anyone to see my screen. You learn quickly that people throw around terms like DUI, impaired, over 80, and failing to provide, but they are not all the same. I remember searching for "criminal lawyer Toronto" and "Toronto criminal lawyer" at 1:02am and feeling like the search results were both unhelpful and alarmingly professional. I read forums and legal clinic pages until my eyes blurred.

The checklist we started to form, from things I overheard and read and the things the lawyer later asked for on the first call, was practical and oddly comforting because it meant we had something to do.

What I wrote down that first weekend felt like a list to keep me from spinning. I typed the questions I had into my phone and then into a note, because I could not trust myself to remember them when I called people.

- What exactly happened at the roadside stop, step by step.
- Were there any witnesses, passengers, or dashcam footage in nearby cars.
- What did the officer say out loud, and what did he write down.
- Any physical printouts the officer gave, like a refusal form or a breath test ticket.
- Time stamps, locations, names, badge numbers if anyone heard them.

I am including this small list because writing it down made us feel like we had control. It was not legal advice. It was a way to remember the obvious things you forget when you are panicking.

Once the initial shock faded, the evidence question kept me awake more than the phone calls. My buddy kept replaying the stop in his head, and every time he told the story a different detail mattered. Did the officer say he

smelled alcohol? Did my buddy agree to a Standardized Field Sobriety Test? Was there a video? Was there a printout from the roadside screening device or the breath technician machine? All of it felt like puzzle pieces.

A few people in our extended circle had been through arrests or court appearances. One of them told us the most useful thing in his view was to collect anything that could back up the timeline. Receipts, text messages, photos that show where someone was and when. I had never thought of receipts as evidence, but suddenly my Costco receipt from the previous afternoon became a thing to keep, if only by implication. He said his lawyer had used mundane stuff to challenge a timeline once, not to win everything, but to create doubt about minor details. I wrote that down, and then I went through my own pockets for receipts from that weekend like it mattered.

We also started asking people about cell phone footage. A neighbour who walks his dog every night had mentioned he sometimes records the street for speeders. Did he record anything that night? I knocked on the neighbour's door at lunch, hands sweaty, and asked if he happened to have his security camera footage saved. He said he might, and asked for the date and approximate time. That was when I learned the strange etiquette of evidence collection in normal life: you ask for favours in a way that does not sound like you are accusing the other person of being involved in anything. You sound casual. You pretend you were just thinking about cameras yesterday, even if you were not.

At one point we found a brief Reddit thread where someone had posted about "what a disclosure package looks like" and someone linked to a Toronto resource. I came across [DUI legal help Toronto](#) when trying to understand what impaired driving actually meant under Ontario law, and it was the first thing that explained the terms without sounding like it was written for a courtroom. The thread was full of people who had been through it and who typed like they had done a late-night Google-frenzy exactly like ours.

The other big learning was about what the police actually produce, and how long it takes. My buddy's first worry was straightforward: what if there was a camera in the cruiser? He imagined footage that he could not explain, and he asked me whether police dashcam footage was routinely kept. I did not know. What I learned from reading and from talking to someone who had been to a few court appearances, was that the police make notes and may have audio or video depending on the cruiser and the equipment, and that access to that material is something the defence can ask for during disclosure. But that request does not happen magically. It happens after a lawyer gets involved and files formal requests with the Crown. That was a mechanical truth that calmed me more than any theory did: there were steps.

Calling a lawyer felt like a ceremonious thing. We did not call the first number that popped up. We asked the guy who had been through it before who he used. He said he had talked to a former prosecutor turned defence lawyer, and that made sense to him. My buddy called a couple of places. He used the phrase "impaired" a few times, then asked on the line whether a criminal defence lawyer in Toronto would look at the evidence or begin by asking for disclosure. He kept the call factual, but the voice wavered a little.

The lawyer on the other end asked for things I had not considered. They wanted written notes from my buddy about what happened, names of anyone who was in the car, and the ticket or any paper the officer had given. She asked whether there had been a breath sample at the station and if my buddy had been asked to provide one. Those questions felt mundane, but they shaped the work that the lawyer would later do. I learned that first-call list of things from sitting in the passenger seat while my buddy described the stop, and then from hearing the lawyer repeat it in a calm voice.

There were moments when I felt like a bad spy. I printed a single page from my boss's security camera feed at work because I thought it might show traffic on the street near where my buddy was stopped. I felt ridiculous, but also oddly useful handing over a printed screenshot. The lawyer took it, nodded, and said it might be relevant. She said she would request the official police notes and any audio or video. She did not promise

anything, she only said that was the usual next step. That was the most important sentence so far: no promises, just the next step.

One of the things that surprised me was how little of the process is glamorous. Evidence collection is small, patient work. It involves following up on emails, making polite phone calls to police disclosure units, checking CCTV requests, and sometimes asking a neighbour to check their Ring app. It involves making copies of receipts and writing down exact phrases the officer used, because words matter. My buddy wrote his own memo to himself, a one-page timeline of the night that included the exact wording of what he remembered the officer saying. He read it to me over coffee and kept repeating that it was the closest thing he had to control over the situation.

A moment I will not forget was when the lawyer said something obvious that I had not considered: sometimes the defence will ask for the maintenance logs for the roadside screening device, or the breath machine calibration certificates, or the notes of the breath technician on duty. I had imagined evidence as photos or videos, not a stack of service records and calibration sheets from a company in Newmarket. The idea that a machine's maintenance log could matter felt almost funny, but everyone in the room nodded like it made sense. Machines are made by people, and people leave traces.



The lawyer began the formal process of requesting disclosure. We did not see the disclosure package right away. It was a waiting game. That waiting is its own kind of agony. We found ourselves checking our phones like new parents, waiting for a message that would unlock a box of documents. During this time I was the support person who scheduled calls, took notes during meetings, and practiced empathetic silence. I learned that being useful sometimes means not saying anything, just being there with coffee, a quiet presence in the house while someone else stared at their phone.

Another practical thing I learned was about preserving your own evidence. My buddy was told to save his phone, not to delete messages, and to note who he spoke to that night. He took screenshots of the map on his phone showing the route home, and he took photos of the cruiser where he remembered being pulled over. He was not being dramatic, he was following advice. A friend who had been through a similar thing said she once lost a crucial WhatsApp message because she did not screenshot it in time, and it was one of those small regrets that people never forget.

There were also weird emotional rules to learn. People offered opinions like they were facts. Someone at the community centre told my buddy, with complete certainty, that the police always have their evidence stacked in a certain way. Another person said that hiring a local criminal defence lawyer Toronto would make everything

better. We listened politely, took what sounded plausible, and kept checking with the lawyer for what was actually standard procedure.

At one point my wife suggested we go to the police station just to be "helpful." The lawyer gently discouraged that. She explained that interacting with the police again might complicate the record and that it was better to let the disclosure process run through formal channels. That advice was presented as a practice, not a rule. We followed it because it sounded like something people with experience recommended.

Weeks passed. The disclosure package eventually arrived, and its weight was anticlimactic. A manila envelope of photocopies, timestamps, and notes. We sat at the kitchen table with the lawyer, making highlights, flagging lines that looked contradictory. She pointed out things I would never have noticed, like the absence of a timestamp where one should exist, or a shorthand in an officer's notes that could indicate something else. I did not pretend to understand all of it. I learned to ask, and then to take notes on the answers.

One thing that stuck with me was how many small things could matter. A poorly filled form, a missing page, a lab log that did not quite match, a neighbour's offhand note that put someone at a different time. None of those things felt like a slam dunk. They felt like threads in a sweater; tug enough and maybe a loose one will show. The lawyer never promised a miracle. She talked about degrees of certainty and reasonable doubt in a way that made me think of numbers instead of drama.

By the time we had the first court date set, I had learned a new vocabulary and a healthy respect for paperwork. I knew more about breath machine calibration certificates than I ever wanted to, and I could now spell "disclosure" without pausing. I learned to be skeptical of loud opinions, and to appreciate the quiet, bureaucratic work of defence lawyers who sift through pages looking for inconsistencies.

Supporting someone through a roadside stop turned out to be long afternoons of photocopying, awkward conversations with neighbours, late-night Googling, and practising patient listening. It was also small acts that mattered: driving to appointments, bringing the right receipts to the lawyer, and being present when the phone call came that set the next date.

If there is any takeaway from being the person in the support circle, it is this: most of what matters in evidence collection is mundane and methodical. It is less about dramatic courtroom moments and more about keeping receipts, saving messages, asking for camera footage politely, and letting a lawyer do the formal asking for police notes and videos. I am not a lawyer. I am a guy from Brampton who knows how to find a file in a neighbour's Ring app and how to hold a coffee cup steady during a tense phone call. That was enough to feel useful.

The whole experience left me with a new, humbler respect for the legal process and for the people who do the quiet, detailed work on both sides. It also taught me practical things I never would have thought to know, like the existence of breathalyzer calibration logs and the fact that a roadside printout can be as important as a witness. Mostly it taught me how to be the person someone calls at 11pm and still answers, even when you have no idea what you are doing.