

PIECES OF MY PATH

Write It Down!

by Zoe Tummillo

Well... first you have to know how to write! What's going on? Are our educators really serious about considering no longer teaching handwriting in elementary school? Hello? Aren't most of the "foundation" documents of the world let alone our nation handwritten? So, it's now OK that entire generations would not know how to read the originals or copies thereof?

And that's just the beginning of my tantrum... Worshipers at the alter of the electronics cult will loudly protest that hand-writing, penmanship, cursive and all their relatives are now irrelevant! As long as there is a plug socket, a WIFI, a laptop, a tablet, a smartie-phone or one of their relatives handy – well who needs to write anything?

One of my fondest memories is when I was not yet ten years old, and my father began teaching me

Spencerian penmanship. His handwriting was absolutely magical, and I was fascinated as I would watch him sign documents, checks and letters with a flourish! The whorls and twists produced actual penman art; I made it clear that I wanted him to teach me how to write the way he did.

He patiently indulged my attempts. He explained that the person who had taught him had told him that unless your hand and fingers could "... learn how to float on the air and fly like a small bird" you could never master the art! Well, I tried and tried and it was a wonderful day when – somewhere in my teens – he said that I had crossed an invisible line of some kind and was now a Spencerian penman (a term not yet politically incorrect!).

It is almost impossible for me to imagine the mind that could so distort its logic, to actually convince itself that the cultural anchor, acoutrement, skill, tradition and benchmark of

handwriting is expendable!

No matter how loudly they protesteth, email is not "the same as" a written letter, texting is not the same as talking to a real person, electronic documents are not actual documents, and essence is not substance! The ragged, lopsided poorly executed scratchings that pass for writing by the typical young clerk or student or kid-next-door (that is, if you can pry their electronic device out of their hot little hands for ten seconds...) is not handwriting! It's a deplorable statement about our approach to thorough teaching, our attitude about the link of such skills to history and culture, and the seductive power of the trendy.

Have you ever dared to hide one of these devices from its owner for even five minutes and observed the intense surge of the reaction? If it were not so serious, it would be hilarious. Writing is but one of the casualties to which the reaction is linked.

When I think about a theme for an article, I try to do as much research as I can to counter balance my own opinions and attitudes. (Sometimes it works!) It has been fascinating to observe how little thought and reflection goes into what passes for interpersonal communication in this instantized wireless/electronic sphere. Almost everything is immediate – and of course, not retrievable. Contemplation? One young woman asked me what the word meant. Pause? Consider? Can those qualifiers be accomplished at warp speed?

Then there is the new version of "sharing..." Now that one is truly scary, and has virtually retired the classic concept of privacy. The most intimate of thoughts buzz rapidly back and forth without substance. Gone is the pen that hesitates above the paper for a heartbeat or two while we rethink the choice of a word that would be "permanent" on the paper, in the hand of the recipient!

Write it down? Good grief! That would take time (and commitment). That would require thought, a piece of paper, a pen or pencil (yuk) and the skill of



penmanship.

Planned obsolescence in product development, high-speed for everything, quick taps on all sizes of keyboards -- it almost seems like a cultural exodus from ... what? It is faster to type, so abolish handwriting in our schools? Oh, there will be a piper to pay someday for such rationales!

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