

# The heartbreak of handwriting

**Bill Hall/Lewiston Tribune**

Note that I am writing this in perfect letters supplied by my computer. Be grateful I am not using what is known as "cursive" or "handwriting."

Those of us who have long been humiliated by inept longhand writing should be grateful that cursive is being pushed aside by keyboards.

I can barely write in legible swirling ways that link all the letters together. I am not a physically artistic person. I can enjoy other people's visual skills, but I can no more express myself in squiggly writing than I can sing or draw in ways that are pleasing to other human beings.

The public schools of my childhood required me to make a fool of myself using letters all lashed together in ways that quickly turned sloppy. Longhand writing was a skill that made artsy folks look great and the rest of us look hopeless. Forcing visual and musical skills on people born without them results in miserable personal failures.

My own realm - spinning yarns - is a kick in the pants for me, but it should not be forced on other people who have other interests and skills. Painting and sculpting and singing and strumming guitars and dancing and whittling should be sampled by most students on a trial basis just to let us each find our niche. But that doesn't mean the schools should shove other people's passions down the throats of those who are ungifted in such pursuits.

Many of us who are greatly lacking in singing and drawing skills aren't just being difficult. We really were born this way, incapable of drawing straight lines or sweeping curves. We do not deliberately sing off key. And we do not fail to dance exquisitely because we are lazy. We dance in incompetent, ugly ways because we were born with the grace of an inebriated buffalo.

We all have some of the various abilities of human beings, but nobody should expect everyone to be capable of everything. No school system should try to push every last child in over his depth whether that is art, chemistry, mathematics, writing or designing pizzas. Give every child a taste of all the talents in our world, but don't torture him by forcing us all into the favorite realms of the education big shots who create the curriculum.

Just as you would make me an embarrassed and unhappy camper if you put me on a stage in front of a crowd and made me try to sing, don't bury me in math, physics or yodeling. We aren't all cut out to be Einstein, Picasso, Babe Ruth or Willie Nelson.

That brings us back to pretty handwriting. I assure you, I can no more write in gifted pen strokes than I can draw the face of a flower or sing the song of a bird. My arms and hands and head are not linked in that wonderful way.

So why was I required to waste a semester of my life trying to overcome my natural failure at longhand writing?

There are days when I look at my own handwriting and wonder what pathetic child wrote such feeble attempts at creative communication. And upon realizing that the child was me, I am reminded once more of the cranky nature of that woman who taught cursive writing to me and her other victims.

That overcrowded class of born incompetents stretched her patience thin and she grew more unpleasant by the day, flogging us verbally for our chronic clumsiness. I have never forgotten that day when she became infuriated at the boy sitting directly in front of me. She grabbed a handful of his hair in her meaty fist, shaking his noggin back and forth.

That kind of wrath, directed at a kid who wouldn't buckle down to cursive writing, may have been part of the reason I eventually signed up for a typing class where everybody's words looked the same. That typing class freed me from trying to say something elegant by dragging a pen in jiggly, heavy-handed loops and swirls across a page.

I suppose cursive still has some odd uses, but I will not miss it so long as I am able to speak to you through my liberating friend, the computer. I cannot write in the fancy flourishes of yesteryear, but we can all write in perfect letters by tapping on a keyboard.

(I warn you: Agree with me or I will sing.)

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