

There is much about writing that appeals to me. First and foremost, of course, is the exposure of one's ideas to a broader group of people than just the individuals that one sees in person. But, almost equally enticing to me are the actual materials involved in the process and the act of writing itself. Although I use this Mac laptop to compose these essays for our website and also keep in touch with two or three friends via e-mail, most of my writing is done in the traditional way—pen or pencil on paper.

I like paper. I can find no enjoyment in browsing through a clothing store or an establishment that sells jewelry, furniture, or other specifics that intrigue many people, but I can spend a lot of time in an office supply store.

This is not a recent interest. When other children might have wanted candy or toys, my greatest desire—if there was an opportunity for a small purchase—was for what I called “pads.” These were small notepads in several pastel colors, all secured by a gummy strip into one thicker entity. I don't remember precisely what I wrote on them, but I used them up and was always glad to get more.

During our school years, we were able to buy paper and pencils in the school office. Standard 3-hole notebook paper in a pad with a blue paper cover was a dime, and we could get two pencils for a nickel. As we progressed through the school system, we eventually came to seventh grade, the point at which we began to move from classroom to classroom to the various teachers instead of staying in one room with one instructor. At this point, most of us used “zipper notebooks.” These were covered in faux leather or other material and were a couple of inches thick. The zipper closed the notebook that could hold not only paper in the three-hole binder, but also loose papers in the pockets in front and back. It was also a secure place to leave pencils and pens with no danger of losing them. The zipper notebooks were a good tool.

I must say, though, that for those of us with less than orderly habits, the notebooks were often closed over a huge mess, and opening the zipper resulted in a spewing forth of paper, perhaps a paperback book or two, extraneous notes, some school assignments, pens and pencils, and other items that could only be described as detritus.

I enjoy writing and receiving letters. If stationery were easily available, I might well purchase attractive writing paper and matching envelopes, though I really need paper with lines to keep my writing in order. But, since such stores aren't in our shopping area—if they exist anymore at all—I resort to my old standby of lined notebook paper. Sometimes, I use a pen, sometimes a pencil.

Walking down the lane to the mailbox and dropping in a letter to one of my faraway friends is a pleasant task. As I prop the envelope against the side in the mailbox, shut the door, and pull up the red metal flag that will alert the mail carrier to stop even if she has no mail for us, I think about the friend who will find my letter in her mail someday soon. I recall the handwritten visit I had with her and anticipate her reply. And opening the mailbox on other days brings the delight of finding a handwritten letter from a friend in between all the mail that involves asking for money in some way—either through advertising products for sale or through appeals for money from a charity or

other organization.

Sitting down with pen and paper, I find it easier to “visit” with a friend than over the telephone, through electronic methods, or even through a personal visit. I can sit with my paper and contemplate what I wish to say. I can think about questions I have for her. I can expound on some bad government policy (easy to do these days). I can reminisce about some activity or event in my childhood or write about some new project I have underway. I can write about books I am reading, and ask for her recommendations. And, I think we are “open” in a way that we reserved folks of Scandinavian background find very difficult in person. In some ways, a handwritten letter is more “personal” than a “personal visit.”

But the paper itself—so intriguing! I like new magazines—the smell of the paper and ink. In a store I can look at different reams of paper and card stock. And there are notebooks, binders, spiral composition books, journal books, sticky notes, envelopes, all kinds of pencils and pens (certainly an excess that makes it hard to choose), and much more.

Handwriting itself is also a skill that, I have read, is beneficial to our brains. Sadly, many schools have ceased the teaching of cursive writing, and many children are terrible writers. In our family, we could read and write before we started school, and I still remember being mildly chastised for writing cursive in first grade. We were only allowed to print. I don’t suppose that my writing was very good, but I had not realized that it was a craft that had been reserved for teaching at a later date.

So, as soon as this little essay has been “clicked” to our web site, I will take my pen and paper—and my thoughts—to the round oak table. I will sit there with envelopes and stamps ready, and write a letter to a friend. And, I suspect that some day this next week, when I open the mailbox and retrieve the ads and bills, I will find a hand-addressed envelope with a familiar return address in the corner, and I will enjoy another visit from a good friend.