

I have not yet read the book a friend loaned me, Anna Quindlen's *Write for Your Life*, but the implication in the title alone is enough to power my fingers on this keyboard long enough to churn out my thoughts for this little essay.

Many of the people with whom I communicate are as concerned about the effect of technology on our society as I am. It is not that we do not see the utility of such advances. So, it isn't really about what might be wrong with these new methods of communication. Rather, it is nearly all about what is being lost.

Maybe it is because several years of my life after reaching adulthood were centered around the study of history. And history is, of course, a discipline devoted to looking back in time. In many ways the physical remains of those earlier eras are some of our best guides to that past. Original sources such as letters and diaries are rich lodes of information. And they are still being discovered and are bringing us new insights into people and events of the past.

But, with electronic communication, if that is even the word to use, these messages disappear. And, they are mostly spontaneous notes—which may be more insightful, sometimes, than what a person writes down after thinking about it a bit more—but which lack that other human attribute—contemplation.

When we write a letter or compose a paragraph or page for our daily journal, we have the time to pause over the keyboard or to chew the end of our pencil while we think. We consider our words in a different way than we do when we send a quick text message or an e-mail. And, when we press that button on our computer or phone, it is gone beyond our control. When we write letters or journal entries, we can erase, cross out, or delete—depending on the method we are using to record our words—and we can refine our meaning, redo our sentences, and even change our own minds about something purely by writing it down. The power of the pen is truly mighty.

And, then, there is the physical act of writing. Studies have shown that actually taking pen in hand and putting words on paper involve sensory changes, opening up the brain for learning. Our brain activity and fine motor skills are boosted by writing and drawing.

And, then, there is cursive writing, what we used to refer to simply as “writing.” “Printing” was what we did in kindergarten and on to second grade. I recently found two pieces of wide-lined

notebook paper that had been a second grade assignment in Penmanship. The first one, printed neatly, was in the fall, the day after school began. It stated: "School has just begun. This is my best writing." The second sheet was written on May 16, the following spring. It read like this: "School will soon be out. This is my best writing." It was written in careful cursive—what we used to refer to as "writing" as opposed to "printing."

I worry that in progressing so quickly technologically, we don't realize what we are losing until it is too late to recover.