

Speculating on Cause and Effect can lead to a circular thinking process that may or may not be relevant or even interesting. But, we do it anyway. Sometimes, of course, it is in regard to important events or decisions people in high places make. Did Joe Biden's setting aside the campaign to be elected to a second term as President of the United States make people realize how old, out of touch, and downright demented the Republican candidate for the Presidency is? Does the contrast between a young and vibrant Kamala Harris who has spent much of her career as a prosecutor and an aged, obviously morally and ethically unfit criminally convicted opponent have an effect on the American electorate? One can hope so.

But that is not what I wanted to write about in this essay. Far from it. I was thinking about paper and pencils and even pens. And that led to another question to myself: Why do I like (probably even need) to write? After considering it for some time, I have decided that the answer is obscure, that I don't really know if I like paper and pencil because I write or like to write because I love paper and pencil. This is cause and effect with no real determination of which is which.

I have always loved writing materials. When I was a small child—and maybe even today—one could buy a little packet of what I called “pads,” small colored note papers that I suppose people used like today's post-it notes. If I were lucky enough to have a nickel to spend, I would much rather have “pads,” the packet containing a variety of colors, than candy. And that was when a nickel bought a full sized Three Musketeers candy bar, one of my favorites.

The love of paper has never diminished. I am not a shopper, and I have no desire to go into stores for anything but the bare necessities, but I was disappointed when the Office Max store in the nearby town closed. Just to wander through an establishment that smelled like paper and ink was enjoyable.

Pencils hold similar power over me. A regular Number 2 yellow pencil is still the best writing instrument ever devised by humanity. I remember my dad sharpening my pencil with his jackknife, making a precise point that could make words stand out in importance. But, there was another revelation waiting for me when I started school.

School turned out to be a great disappointment when I

realized how far from home five miles was and that we weren't going to immediately begin reading books. But, there was a device in the schoolroom that immediately held a great fascination for me. This was before the days of giant kindergarten pencils. We had regular yellow number twos, and this marvelous little machine on the windowsill could make them even sharper than my father could with his jackknife. And we could use it ourselves! This was the hand-turned kind of pencil sharpener, and we have one here in the cabin now, one I use regularly.

As we progressed through the grades in our small school, all of us soon learned how to replenish our basic school supplies in the most pleasant and efficient way. There was no need to waste time outside of the school day. Instead, we would trudge down the hall to the school office where Mamie Holcomb held sway.

This tiny lady might have held the title of school secretary, but to me she was the most important person in the building outside of my teachers. Always impeccably attired, with her gray hair nearly styled, she was the recipient of our absence excuse notes from our parents, but, mostly, she was the person who handed over the paper and pencils when we brought our nickels and dimes to buy our writing materials. I believe the charge was a nickel for two pencils and a dime for a pad of notebook paper.

My love of paper and pencils, and of writing, has never diminished. Probably the most necessary writing I do—for myself—is my daily journal. I write a page every day, just noting the day's activities, usually, with occasionally a detour into some idea or happening that strikes my interest. But, one of the most important parts of this whole process is the journal book itself. They are not all the same. Some have been the mottled-covered composition books, some have been fancy little volumes designed for journal writing, and they have had covers of all kinds, some with sewed in page markers, some without. My present journal is bright yellow. One of the semi-annual highlights of my daily writing activities is ordering a new journal book. I always do this ahead of time, so I can enjoy seeing this pristine, unmarked volume on the desk as I am writing the last pages of its predecessor.

I happily spend my days in half-worn-out T-shirts, socks with holes in the heels, and faded old sweatshirts. But, I want a sheet of perfectly clean, unmarked paper every day to hold my words. Cause and effect? Something to contemplate.

