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## **The Old, Black Typewriter on Our Mantle**

I found the old, black, heavy Underwood typewriter in a shop in Baker. The shop owner told me it had belonged to Art Woodwell, a man who had been an assayer in Sumpter, Oregon. I was amazed and pleased. Art Woodwell had passed on some years before, and the house we lived in then had been his house. I bought the typewriter and took it home, to its home and mine.

The typewriter became part of my daughters' environment. They often heard me rap-tapping as they went to sleep and far into the night. They experimented with the typewriter, and I showed them how to keep from tangling up the keys and how to gently free them if they did become tangled.

When Juniper and Amanda learned to read and write, they began to use the typewriter. In the beginning, when Juniper was six, and Amanda was four, Juniper worked with the typewriter on the floor. I loved to watch her type. She sat on the floor in front of the typewriter, hit the letters with her fast-flying forefinger, and operated the space bar with the big toe of her right foot.

Amanda started typing at the kitchen table. Juniper eventually moved the typewriter from the floor to tables or desks.

Periodically, someone outside the family commented on my daughters' typing technique. "Why don't they type with more fingers?"

Nudged by the culture's concern for the economic potential of nearly everything, when Juniper was eight and Amanda was six, I renewed an old discussion. "I can teach you how to type with all your fingers."

Juniper asked, "Why?"

"It's a faster, more efficient way to type."

"I'm going fast enough now."

Amanda asked, "What's the big rush?"

Juniper said, "I'm efficient. I don't make very many mistakes. I type as fast as I think of what I want to write."

Laura joined in. "If you ever want to make a living typing, you'll need to know how to type with all your fingers."

Juniper said, "I won't want to make a living typing."

Amanda said, "We're too young to worry about making a living."

I never argue with irrefutable logic. They continued typing with one finger each. It wasn't hunt and peck, because they didn't hunt. They knew where the letters were, and they achieved impressive speed and clean manuscripts.

A few years later, the typewriter began to malfunction. It sometimes wouldn't ring the bell, observe tabs, or stop at the right margin. A typewriter repairman said he couldn't fix it, because he couldn't get parts for it. We had moved to a place with electricity. I bought a word processor.

The word processor fascinated Amanda and Juniper, and they explored it enthusiastically. Then Juniper went back to the old, black typewriter for all her work and Amanda for most of hers.

Juniper said the word processor was too easy to play with; she found herself deleting text unnecessarily and seeing what else the machine could do, instead of writing.

Amanda said she found it too easy to revise on the processor. She revised and revised and didn't get on with composing. She used the processor to prepare final manuscripts, but she used the Underwood for any composition she didn't do in longhand.

Though my daughters had problems with the typewriter when I did, once I switched to the word processor, the Underwood gave them no further problems. Tab, margin, and bell all worked. I refuse to formulate any theory about that.

The Underwood became their typewriter.

After centering their education in our home, Amanda and Juniper decided to go to public high school one year each to see what it was like. They both took a class that taught them to use word-processing systems, with all fingers operating the keyboard. They went on to college, and they used computer labs to prepare manuscripts. By then, I used a computer, and they used my computer when they were home from college.

I wondered if I should dispose of the typewriter. It was big and heavy, and it would take up space if we moved. As usual, I consulted everyone about any idea I had for possible changes.

Amanda said "It makes sense to keep the typewriter. Some time, weeks ago, maybe months, I dreamed we didn't have electricity again. I used a manual typewriter to keep writing. I think we should keep it."

Computers can be unpredictable. So can electricity, especially in mountain habitations, where lightning sometimes

severs power lines, or where heavy snow breaks them.

I bought a ribbon for the old, black, heavy Underwood,  
cleaned the dust and cobwebs out of it, and oiled moving parts.

Now the old, black typewriter sits handsomely on the  
mantle, still part of our family's creative history, ready for use.