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Redd Boggs, editor

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"Improve every opportunity to express yourself in writing, as if it were your last." -- Thoreau, Journal, 17 December 1851.

I will watch the watchers.

Frolic Footnotes to a Life: Some Fannish Memories

5. Tap-tap-taptap-tap-tap-ping!

Although I have been in fandom more than 30 years, most of my fanac has been bashed out on but three different typewriters, with some small assistance from a few other machines, borrowed or rented.

My first typewriter was bought for me by my parents in November 1939, while I was still learning to type in a special "Personal Typing" class at school. They paid about \$30 for a rather old L. C. Smith, purchased from a small, obscure typewriter store that was set up in the livingroom and sunporch of a residence somewhere in north Minneapolis. The proprietor's name, I believe, was Jorgenson, and she may have come from Denmark, but I don't think her first name was Christine.

I never got to type more than "N_ow iS teh t ime," etc., on the typewriter I first selected, and that while it was still in the store. The machine was somehow jarred out of kilter on the way home, while sitting on the floor in the back of the family Ford V-8 and thus had to be exchanged for another machine a day or two hence. The first machine had the shift lever on the righthand side, an oldfashioned arrangement that is seldom found in typewriters cis-1930, it seems. Its replacement had a lefthand shift such as I really wanted anyway.

The typewriter that was finally mine was another ancient L. C. Smith, an office model pica machine that proved a good and faithful companion in my creative moods for 11 years and more. It was placed without ceremony on the lefthand end of my desk -- it was some years before I acquired a typewriter stand -- and I soon began to experience the electric pleasures that vibrate through the system when fingertips are positioned eight abreast along the typewriter keys and the mind is prop-

erly plugged into the giddy cosmos. This, I discovered, was an etude of contentment indeed, and I have often indulged myself in this resounding joy during these three decades and more. If I am ever struck by lightning and hurled huarachis, plum-hued T-shirt, tippie of Grand Marnier, and all, into the hereafter between one wink and an incipient next, I hope I shall be happily trilling away at the typer keys at the time.

On this typewriter with somewhat battered black finish and round black keys, I cut my first fan stencil in March 1947 for Caprice (a one-shot), and hammered out every subsequent stencil for my fanzines till sometime in February 1951. That historic machine, which created Sky Hook among other masterworks, was turned over to my younger sister after I was finished with it, not as a hand-me-down but as payment for some modest debt I owed her. The machine has now disappeared utterly; no one in the family remembers what happened to it.

Early in 1951, having been paid my state soldiers bonus, I decided to squander some money on another and, I hoped, better typewriter. After some shopping, I discovered a staunch, rebuilt Underwood for sale at the Typewriter Clearing association, then at 112 South Fourth street in Minneapolis. One of my reasons for choosing an Underwood was that I had had especially good luck using this brand of machine while an army clerk during the war years. I paid for the typewriter with a crisp \$100 bill which I casually tossed onto the counter beside the cash register, a grandiose gesture I could never have made earlier in my life and precious seldom since. I received a certain amount of change from the bill, though I cannot remember how much. The saleswoman also knocked off \$5 for spot cash: imagine that!

The Underwood was an office model with elite type. It had, I remember, a black mottled finish set off with chrome strips, and was one of those typewriters with a small crank on the righthand side for ribbon rewinding. One of the several typewriters owned by Dean A. Grennell circa 1956 was an Underwood of nearly identical appearance and typeface. My new machine steadfastly battered out the stencils for all Gafia press publications from February 1951 to September 1958.

Having noticed on one or two occasions when I borrowed back my old "Elsie" Smith from my sister that I could actually type faster and more accurately on that contraption than on my own Underwood, I eventually decided to buy myself a new machine more adjusted to my idiosyncrasies as a typist, probably a Smith-Corona. However, when I went shopping for a new typewriter early in September 1958, I finally decided -- by what process of reasoning escapes me now -- to be modern and go electric. A few hours later, I dazedly came home the owner of a rebuilt IBM Executive model typewriter with carbon ribbon. I suspected even before I arrived home that I had made a costly mistake, and I was right. I found I had great difficulty adjusting my thunderous touch to the skittish keys of the IBM. My manual dexterity rates only slightly above that of a paralyzed pachyderm. I tried mightily to get used to caressing the keys instead of banging them halfway through the table-top underneath, but did not altogether succeed. Even worse, I found the hum and mutter of the IBM, as it waited for me to compose, an irritation that made sitting at the typewriter no fun at all; indeed, almost as bad as a case of vom-bosia. And I had always found this posture such a soothing pleasure.

Furthermore, the carbon ribbon was not for me. Even though at the time I was doing relatively little corresponding or fanzining, I used up a whole ribbon almost every day. Replacing the ribbon was a painful operation for me who hates ribbon-changing even on a conventional typewriter, where I change the ribbon once every five years whether it needs it or not. As a result of all these irritations, I phoned the typewriter company and told the salesman to come and take away the IBM; I implied that he knew what to do with it, difficult as that might be.

I replaced the finicky electric machine with a rebuilt mechanical Underwood in modern gray finish and featuring pica type. This was the only other typewriter in the store at the time that fetched me even a little. I had gotten the IBM on a 30-60-90-day charge; now I paid for the Underwood in cash, the difference between its total price and the down payment on the IBM being small.

While waiting for the IBM to be picked up and replaced by the gray Underwood, I continued to use the electric for correspondence. Intending to buy one more carbon ribbon to tide me over the coming weekend till the machine was gone, I stopped in at the Typewriter Clearing association, the same company where seven years earlier I had bought the old black Underwood (though the store was now at a new location: 932 Hennepin, Minneapolis -- I wonder if it's still there?). While in that shop, I glanced idly over the typewriters on display, and my eyes lighted on the array of Hermes typewriters on sale. With no sense of destiny at all, I sauntered over to inspect them. The salesman, evidently assuming that a man who owned an IBM (I had already bought a carbon ribbon) would not be buying a conventional typewriter, sleepily demonstrated the features of a big new Hermes Ambassador more to be doing something than with a hope that I would be interested. He was flabbergasted when I said, "I'll take it," and handed over a \$10 deposit.

I was so enamored of my new acquisition, I remember, that before it could be delivered into my hands I once detoured a considerable distance on my way to work merely to gaze at the Hermes through the dusty panes of the closed-up typewriter store, much as one might peer at his beloved through the iron-grill gates of a convent.

On New Year's eve, a few months later, my mother, in a nostalgic mood, began to enumerate the satisfactions and triumphs various members of the family had achieved during the expiring year. When she came to me, she remarked, "Well, in your case of course the high point was your buying a car." (She referred to the Rambler, already cleft Honeybee, that transported many a Los Angeles fan all over southern California a few years later.) I corrected her by saying, honestly enough, "No, my high point of the year was the purchase of a new typewriter."

Upon my acquisition of the Hermes, I was in the strange position of owning a piece of three different typewriters: the Hermes, the damnable IBM (which I had arranged to return to the shop), and the gray Underwood I had chosen to replace the IBM. The Underwood was delivered on Monday and the detested IBM was picked up. The Hermes Ambassador arrived on Tuesday. Using the already superseded Underwood as a trade-in on the Hermes would have meant taking a considerable loss; therefore, after due cogitation I decided to bestow the superfluous machine on a friend who

was trying to operate as a writer and fan behind the keyboard of a Remington Noiseless that (as I understood it) needed to be nursed along like a cranky invalid.

The Typewriter Clearing association assured me that they were experts in the job of crating and shipping typewriters, and I duly commissioned them to send off the gray Underwood by express to the distant friend. Despite the expertise lavished on the job, and for which I paid dearly, the poor benighted machine arrived at its destination banging around loose in the crate. It was of course thoroughly battered and bent, though marginally repairable. But that's another story.

Neither the briefly-owned IBM nor the briefly-owned Underwood was ever used by me to cut a single word into stencil wax for Gafia press. But their successor, the Hermes Ambassador, has grown grey in my service (only figuratively, of course, since it still has the light-green finish it had at the start -- the only thing about the machine that I did not especially like). Indeed, the Hermes is skilfully stenciling this very page, nearly 16 years after I first clapped eyes on the machine while buying a carbon ribbon. It has stenciled the main text of nearly all Boggszines since the autumn of 1958. When I set out for California in 1962, the Hermes was the first thing I put into the car. I lugged it all the way in the backseat underneath a load of clothes and books.

This machine is a formidable office model machine which is built by Paillard, Ltd, of Switzerland ("fabrication Suisse" is stamped into the metal under the lid that covers its vitals). The typeface is Director Pica, a slightly flattened-down version of regular pica.

In October 1958, after I had owned the Hermes only a month, I decided to augment its mellifluous voice with another's, and thus make an harmonious duet. Therefore I searched out and bought from the American Typewriter company in Minneapolis a venerable L. C. Smith of even earlier vintage than my first typewriter of 1939. It was a heavy and boxy affair so solidly built that a fall from the Eiffel tower would not faze it. Early in the century, it seems, it was owned by the Soo Line railroad and pounded by its clerks for many a year without giving up the ghost. It is painted in the vile olive drab that was common for office equipment and furniture prior to world war 2, and it has an old-fashioned righthand shift lever, too.

While technically the typeface is not micro-elite, since the letter-spacing is the same as ordinary elite, I intended this "Elsie" to function as an auxiliary machine in publishing my fanzines. Till I left Minneapolis four years later, it stenciled small-print footnotes and blurbs, as well as some departmental material, for Discord and other fanzines of that era. However, I had to leave it behind in 1962, and it only came back into my possession in May 1972, thanks to my brother Jerry, who was visiting California. It is back home at last!

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