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New Technology

by

Tom Holbrook

I find it amazing that sometimes the smallest little thing can grab your attention and occupy your mind for hours, sometimes days, on end. Case in point... I witnessed two women performing essentially the same task, under different circumstances and at two separate locations, and their performance jolted my mind back to when I was 16 years old and beginning my Junior year in high school. No way you say... oooooohhhh yes... WAY! What was the task these two women were doing and how did it relate to my high school years? I'll get to that in a moment.

First, let me ask you a question. Do any of you out there readily recognize the significance of the following letters....QWERTY? I would say that upwards of 90% of you have stumbled across these same letters many times in your life and probably never even paid attention. Not familiar to you? Let me add one more word in conjunction with the above letters...“QWERTY Keyboard.” AHA! I hear some of you exclaiming, but still too vague for the rest of you? Allow me to elucidate.

In 1873 a Wisconsin newspaperman, poet and part-time inventor, Christopher Sholes, together with two colleagues, put together the first widely produced, practical model of what would become our modern typewriter. They called it a Type-Writer but the hyphen was removed several years later... obviously to save ink. Because he lacked the fortitude to hack through the forest of marketing and refinement of his invention, and because his model seemed to have a problem with keys sticking at the wrong time, Mr. Sholes sold his interests to another friend James Densmore who figured out how to prevent the sticking problem and hired Philo Remington, of Remington rifle fame, to market the machine. It was 1874 when the first Sholes – Glidden (Remington) machine went on the market. The Remington Model soon became the standard.

The sticking problem was solved by changing the keyboard's configuration from a standard in-line alphabet to grouping the more often used letters in areas unto themselves, thereby having the keys come up from different directions. Voila.... The “QWERTY keyboard.” (For those of you who do not type these six letters appear on the top left of your standard typewriter/word processor keyboard.) The earlier models of this typewriter looked much like a sewing machine since it was being produced by the Sewing Machine division of Remington Arms, makers of the Remington Rifle. The machine even had a foot pedal to advance the paper and included “sweet little flowers” painted on its side.

From the seeds planted by this early model many other non-QWERTY keyboard machines were invented and produced over the years: The Hammond, The Crandall, and The Blickensderfer (the first electric typewriter,) were three of the most popular. However, the QWERTY alignment of

letters became the accepted norm and most usable of designs and almost every machine on the market today maintains that configuration. By the 1920's most of the machines on the market evolved into look-a-likes and the 1895 Underwood was one of the most copied designs of all typewriters. I could mention all the other typewriter wannabes that were tried and failed but space won't allow it. I should mention that the first English patent for a "typewriter" was in 1714 and the first American patent was issued to Wm. Austin Burt from Detroit in 1829. His first model was destroyed in a fire at the Washington Patent Office and his second model was as large as a modern day pinball machine, so it is obviously didn't create a stir in the market around Christmas time.

The Underwood was the typewriter on which I learned my skills in my junior year in high school and we progressed to the Royal Electric machines in my Senior year. Other than English grammar, the typing classes I took in high school have positively affected my life more than any other. It allowed me to have a great position in the National Guard as a teletype/krypto operator and every job following, including the writing of this column has been enhanced by my experience. My three sons were mandated by their mother and me to take two years of typing and even though they fought it at the time, they will attest to the benefits that particular skill has added to their lives.

The two ladies I referred to at the beginning of this article were trying to type different types of forms having to do with businesses we were visiting and their ability and lack thereof affected their performance of their jobs and the time I had to spend in line waiting on them. If you are a grand parent, or parent, who has (grand) children preparing to go into high school please insist that they include typing and/ or computers in their curriculum before they get out. Of course, these days many schools are beginning to teach computer skills to kids in elementary school, which is great. In today's world it is an absolute must.

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