

# Opinion

## Loyalty to old writing machines a typographical error

You know what really bugs me about Andy Rooney? He loves typewriters. So does Lewis Grizzard. William Zinsser, in his book "On Writing Well," assures writers that forsaking typewriters for word processors isn't sacrilege it's progress. He states the obvious. These gentlemen insist on romanticizing about typewriters. Many other "seasoned" journalists like to recall the good old days when newsrooms were more "flavorful" because of the incessant clackety-clacking of typewriter keys.



Loren Steffy

But like Reagan's recollections of the McCarthy Era, the memory is selective — it has to be. The old-timers may recall the comforting sounds of keystrokes with the fondness that one might remember a fine melody, but I guarantee the sweet pecks were accompanied by less delightful utterings — namely swearing.

I know because from time to time I try to use the maniacal mechanization men call a typewriter. A journalist, I tell myself, should be proficient with this infernal device. I don't know why, that's

just the way it is. Lou Grant and Company used them. Redford and Hoffman, pretending to be Woodward and Bernstein used them. Even Kolchak the Nightstalker used them. Typewriters are more closely associated with journalists than even beer bellies, divorce, nervous breakdowns, heart disease and emphysema.

But they are obsolete. The technology-fighting holdouts who refuse to write on anything they have to plug in or sign on to are simply stragglers, cemented in their outdated ways.

Don't get me wrong, it's not that I can't use a typewriter, it's just that I can't use them properly. I'm a rapid typist, but I'm also a rapid errorist. Correction fluid salesmen can spot me a mile away. Buy a typewriter, they say, knowing that I'm a gallon-a-week guaranteed sale. But it's really not funny. I'm also a deadly typist.

When I flip on the power switch, my wife gathers up the cats and heads for cover. Papers fly. Ribbons fly. Correction fluid flies. Hair flies. Newly invented obscenities fly.

Computers, of course, present no problem. Mistakes can be erased as quickly as they're written. Some computers even erase them for you. Many typewriters now are made with computer-like functions — a perverse hybrid of labor-saving device and manmade frustration. I'm not fooled.

My typewriter troubles started in my childhood when my parents gave me a plastic "Children's Typewriter." The first thing I noticed was the keys were all out of order. It took longer to find the desired letter than it did to write a whole paragraph by hand. Besides, most third grade teachers didn't require homework to be typed and double-spaced.

Eventually, I tried my parents' manual model using the HPC method — hunt, peck and cuss. But I'd just about get up speed, and then I'd have to hit the return handle and start all over.

I took typing in high school, hoping to master this typographical demon. I learned to type (except for the num-



bers; I was absent that day), and I inherited my dad's old clunker when he bought a sleek, new IBM. I considered myself lucky to have my own electric typewriter before I had my own razor. What a boost to my writing career! All I had to do now was come up with subject matter.

But my first typing machine needed more repairs than my '74 Chevy Vega. As typewriters go, this one was an antique, manufactured around

1960. To make matters worse, the "o" key didn't work. Typing without using the circular vowel was detrimental to my abilities. Smetimes I still have trouble.

For graduation I got a new Smith-Corona. It sits in front of the window, daring me to use it. But I'll write on paper (as I did this column, sneering at the

thing the whole time) before I'll my thoughts to that gadget. Man would make a nice, journalistic ter. . . .

My typophobia is starting to take toll on my mental health. I'm starting to have typewriter-induced hallucinations. The other night I was watching "Den Impact," the latest Dirty Harry lead-in-cold-blood extravaganza. Harry threatens the thugs in the and they reply "You and who else thought Clint Eastwood replied, "So Corona and me."

Rooney can have his collection of turn-of-the-century Underwoods. Zinsser can keep his old clacker under John Wayne portrait. Zinsser can't convince millions convincing other writers computers are friend and not foe. doesn't have to sell me.

I know it's a technological crutch. I'll risk a system crash over stuck in any day. When it comes to writing anything between a pen and a computer screen just isn't my type.

Loren Steffy is a senior journalism major and the Opinion Page editor of The Battalion.

### Mail Call

#### First and . . . last?

EDITOR: Where does Karl Pallmeyer think he is? Pallmeyer, this is Texas A&M, not the University of Texas. The Aggie bonfire he talked about in his Nov. 20 column is more than just tradition. Being a freshman, this is my first bonfire, but with more people like you around, it could be my last.

Bonfire does more than keep up a tradition, it unifies many students for one common cause, and this can only help the University. Any risks involved are well worth it, and I think more would agree than disagree. So give up Pallmeyer, and help "BUILD THE HELL OUTTA BONFIRE". Oh, by the way, his hair would look much better with a letter in it.

Blayne Rowland '90

#### Long live roaches

EDITOR: In response to the comment made by University of Texas football player John Hagy (I wish he could read this), they say in the event of a nuclear war, the cockroach will be the only living species to survive. Enough said.

Victoria H. Larroca '88

#### Get back in line

EDITOR: For Christmas, I was going to ask Santa for a few things I've been wanting or needing, such as a compact disc player, some new clothes, a new curling iron and maybe some perfume or jewelry. Of course, this was before I spent 2½ hours dialing 845-TAMU trying to register for next semester, only to get a kink in my neck and a sore arm! Now all I'm going to ask for is a new automatic touch-tone phone with a separate redial button.

Registering by phone may have eliminated lines (I never stood in line for anywhere close to 2½ hours), but at least you could socialize or study or eat rather easily while in line. It's hard to do anything with a receiver on your shoulder, one of your arms constantly dialing and the other holding a registration book. I think I'd rather stand in line!

Michelle Rodeghirer '88

#### Truckloads of trash

EDITOR: Brazos Beautiful and Brazos County say a BIG THANKS to the more than 100 APO volunteers who spent more than five hours cleaning South Texas Avenue and the West Bypass Nov 8. More than 10 truckloads of trash were hauled off. Thanks, Aps, for exhibiting pride in our community.

Diane Mills  
Coordinator, Brazos Beautiful

#### Bring back the sack

EDITOR: Crusaders arise! The task is at hand. We must ban together to stop this heinous intrusion into our lives, perpetuated by grocery stores, of pushing off the new plastic bags on us. The brown paper sacks have been adequate for years, and we must bring them back exclusively.

The success of any worthwhile venture nowadays depends on a catchy slogan. Therefore, I hope everyone who agrees about banning the plastic bags will let me know what they think of the slogan I have chosen: It's better when you get it in the sack!

Bart Braden

#### Shirt sighted

EDITOR: I saw a shirt the other day that said: You can run, but you can't hide, as long as you are not the ayatollah — President Reagan, November, 1986

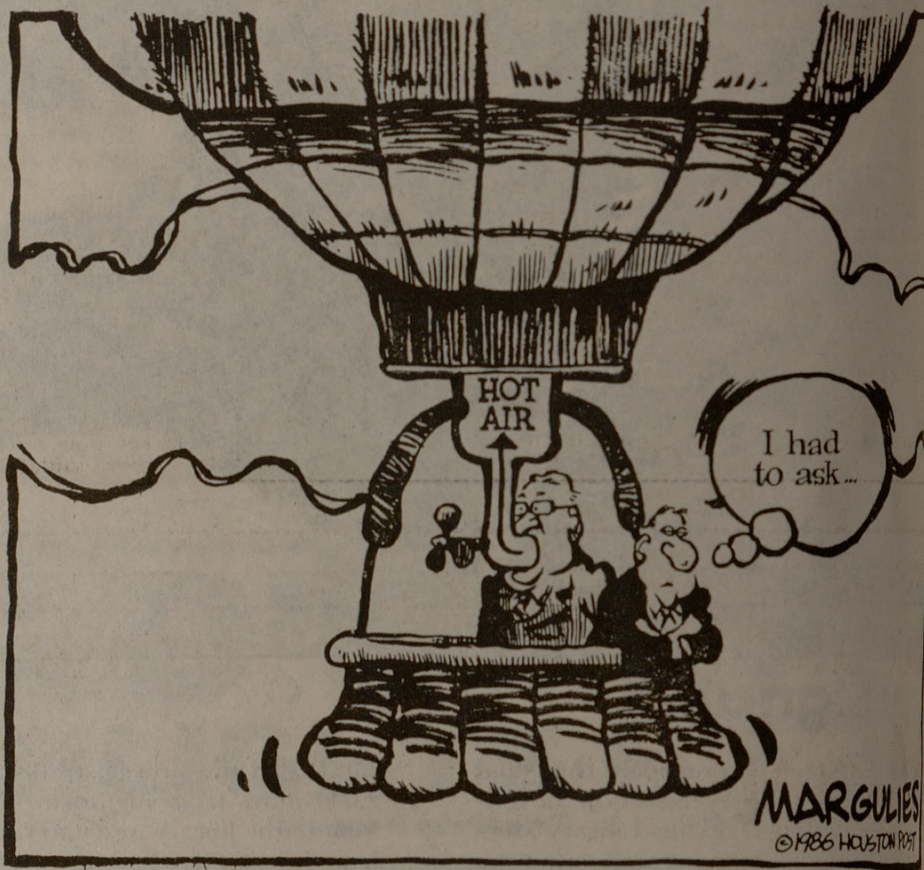
Sekar Annamalai '89

#### Lost ring

EDITOR: A gold ring was lost on Nov. 24 during Elephant Walk. If you know anybody who has found it please call me at 260-1067. A large cash reward is being offered.

Kirk Spessard '87

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the classification, address and telephone number of the writer.



## Transplanted northerners shook up over culture shock

There is a group of Atlantans, formerly New Yorkers, who have formed their own support group called "The New York Network." They get together to whine about all the things they miss about their hometown.



Lewis Grizzard

There was a story about the group in the Atlanta papers last week. It said these people missed such things as egg creams.

Quite frankly, I have no idea what an egg cream is, but as an Atlantan who once was held prisoner of war in Chicago, I know what it is like to be ravaged by homesickness.

I lived in Chicago for nearly three years. It was cold there and the people talked funny.

One day, I met a guy in a bar who also was from the South. I knew that right away when I heard him ask a young lady seated next to him, "Do you think wrestling's fake?"

Southerners are known for their ability to engage in clever repartee in such social situations as trying to pick up a date in a bar.

After the young lady moved several seats away from the man, I began talking with him. It turned out he was from Birmingham, Ala., and he, too, was homesick.

He told me about a support group to

which he belonged, "Grits Anonymous," for misplaced Southerners.

He invited me to attend the group's next meeting. It was wonderful. We filled up the host's Jacuzzi with grits and wallowed around in them until we all felt we could handle Chicago and our homesickness at least until the next meeting.

After some research I found there are other groups of Atlantans who are transplanted Northerners and meet occasionally to deal with problems they have encountered since moving south. There is, for instance, the "Federation of Former New Jersey Americans." The members miss such things as seeing bodies floating in rivers. They meet at Barney's Waterslide every other Wednesday.

"It's not what we're used to, of course," said the group's founder, Nick Valentino, from Newark, "but it does help some of our members to cope."

Then, there's "We're from Cleveland," people who never get to see rivers

burn any more. What they do is rent a raft and float down Atlanta's scenic Chattahoochee River. At lunch they pour gasoline on the river and roast weenies.

I even discovered a group of transplanted Chicagoans, "The Fruit Loopers." Every time the temperature falls below 60 degrees the members take off their clothes and run around outside in hopes of enjoying the invigorating feeling of frostbite once more.

What's obviously happening in our country is more and more people are leaving their roots to find their own tunes, and this obviously can lead to various forms of culture shock.

I eventually left Chicago for homesickness I could no longer handle a foreign way of life, and I am certain the people from New York and New Jersey and Cleveland and Chicago will be leaving the South and returning home soon, too.

Bye, y'all.

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