

## [Elder] Blogging To Give Shape To Our Lives

Back in the olden days when I was growing up, people wrote letters – thoughts laid down on paper with pen and ink – and mailed them to faraway friends and loved ones. Depending on how far away, letters could take days or sometimes weeks to reach their destination and the arrival of a long-awaited postal message was cause for excitement.

Letters were read and re-read and saved in pretty boxes, sometimes a collection of them tied with ribbon. When I was a child and a young woman, long distance telephone calls were too expensive except for celebrations and emergencies. Instead, we wrote letters, passing on personal news and commenting on whatever might be affecting our lives, our minds, our choices at that moment.

When I was about ten years old – five or six years after my father returned from fighting in World War II – I woke late one night to the low murmur of voices in the living room. I crept quietly to the top of the stairs where I discovered in the living room below my parents sitting on the floor in front of the fireplace. Between them was with a cardboard box filled with letters – **V-mail** - which I recognized from the war when my father was away for three years.

Mom and Dad were reading letters aloud to one another, talking about what was written, sometimes hugging or kissing. And when they were finished with each letter, they tossed it in the fire.

My great **Aunt Edith** and I exchanged weekly letters for 25 years. She was my favorite, most trusted older relative and I poured my heart out to her about every good and bad thing that happened to me from age 15.

Visiting her one time when I was about 40, she announced that I was “old enough now for these” as she handed me a box containing every letter I’d written her through all those years – essentially my own biography in my own hand and the most precious gift she ever gave me. (It is so easy to electronically keep everything we write these days that much younger readers may not realize the thrill of such a gift in times prior to personal computers.)

I was reminded of these events while reading Anna Quindlen’s column in *Newsweek* last week. She was holding forth on the new movie, *Freedom Writers* and on the lost art of writing: “...as the letter fell out of favor and education became professionalized, with its goal less the expansion of the mind than the acquisition of a job, writing began to be seen largely as the purview of writers...And in the age of the telephone most communication became evanescent, gone into thin air no matter how important or heartfelt.”

To her credit, Ms. Quindlen recognizes a renewal of writing that has been brought about through technology although she appears to be unaware that it more often takes better form than the "...many [emails] r 2 cursory 4 u" she quotes.

Online writing, and blogging in particular, is so much more than "txt msg" shorthand. In fact, in blogging if you can't or won't spell correctly, if your blog is filled with typos, if your thinking (and therefore your writing) is sloppy and unclear, your blog will be ignored – at least, that appears to be so among elderbloggers who grew up in the days of pen-and-ink writing.

**Quindlen beautifully captures the essence of letter-writing in the olden days:** "The details of housekeeping and child rearing, the rigors of war and work, advice to friends and family; none was slated for publication. *They were communications that gave shape to life by describing it for others.*" [emphasis added]

### **Gave shape to life...**

Although nowadays we publish for all the world to read, I've come to believe this is what personal or identity bloggers, particularly elderbloggers, are doing – giving shape to our lives.

Carl Jung described one of the seven tasks of aging as the need to review, reflect upon and sum up one's life. Most elders have a need to tell their story before they die and Jung himself wrote in his *Memoirs, Dreams, Reflections*, published shortly before his death: "I try to see the line which leads through my life into the world, and out of the world again."

Although it is an imperative for elders, making sense of ourselves and giving shape to our lives is what writing has always been about at any age. Blogging gives that need a new dimension through the medium itself and the sharing of our thoughts with so many others than personal letters allow.

In championing personal writing, Ms. Quindlen laments that it is a "...concept that has been lost in modern life: writing can make pain tolerable, confusion clearer and the self stronger."

I think bloggers – old and young – intuitively know this, and that we are on the bleeding edge of a renaissance in personal writing. Our blogs (and saved emails too) will become as important to our current and future loved ones as handwritten letters were to people of another era.

**Courtesy: Ronni Bennett**