

## Early Signs of a Future Writer

My parents probably did not realize it, but the die was cast when they gave me a little toy typewriter for Christmas. I don't know how old I was, probably six or seven.

That little tin typewriter did not have individual keys, but it had a ribbon and a real platen mounted on a movable carriage, with a carriage return lever. Right in the middle of the slanted face of the typewriter, surrounded by fake painted keys, was a stamping mechanism that made it possible to print letters and numbers, one at a time, on a sheet of paper rolled onto the platen.

What I had to do was turn a wheel on the stamping mechanism to the right letter or number, then press a metal lever to make the thing bang down on the ribbon to leave the right imprint on the paper. Typing more than a few sentences was a slow, laborious process.

But I typed whole letters on that toy machine, and delivered them in person. I wrote them to all the relatives within reach, which meant – since my siblings were too young to read – to Mom and Dad and Uncle Nick when he was working in the greenhouses, and to Aunt Laura who lived down the street. Maybe to others also; I don't remember.

Next I remember a little stamp pad kit. Very simple. Just arrange the individual letters and numbers on the stamper thing and press down on the paper. That was more fun!

I recall stamping my name and address in my books. But for some reason I was not content to just stamp it on the inside front cover. I also stamped it on page 100 of all my books, and on every page numbered as a multiple of 100. Really! I just left my computer to look in a box of old books, and found my childhood copy of *Robin Hood*. On

the inside cover it says in blotchy black ink,

THIS BELONGS TO  
ROLAND F. CHASE  
1 1/2 VICKSBURG PL.  
NEWPORT, R.I.

I turned to page 100 and, sure enough, there it is again, and it's repeated on pages 200, 300, and 400. What was I thinking? I'm not sure exactly, but apparently I was concerned that someone might not only steal my books but take the covers off too. After all, you can still read every page of a cover-less book.

But let me tell you, by the time I got done, my books were theft-proof! Or at least if they were stolen and the culprits were caught, I could prove beyond doubt that the books were mine. "Just turn to page 100, Officer, and there you'll see *my name and address!*"

Then there was the little toy printing press. That was the ultimate gift. It had little letters and numbers, even some punctuation marks, made of rubber. I can't remember exactly how they were mounted on the little drum on the printing press, but my stubby little fingers were up to the task.

And boy, was that ever a great toy! I could print my own notices and announcements and even a newspaper for local distribution. And not just one copy. Once the type was set, and the rollers were inked, I could crank through a whole stack of paper. And then start passing 'em out.

Unfortunately, there do not seem to be any extant copies of what I'm sure were early masterpieces of journalistic enterprise.

But the pattern continued. In college I was a reporter, sports editor, and finally editor-in-chief of the weekly newspaper, *The Wheaton Record*. For my parents' 25th

anniversary, which came during my college years, I and my brother Larry produced a commemorative edition of the *Chase Family Record*.

Later, when I was married and living in Rochester, New York, I spent a hundred bucks on an A. B. Dick mimeograph machine, to my wife's chagrin, and used it for newsletters and flyers to promote our Young Life ministry with high school students. It was also great for producing annual Christmas letters, although I must admit they got less and less annual as time went on.

Did I turn out to be a great writer? Alas, the answer is no. But that doesn't mean I'm not a writer. That's still what I like to do more than almost anything else.

And just think. It all started when I found a little toy typewriter under the Christmas tree!