

The Field Guide: Olivetti

by Deborah Jiang-Stein

Last week, typing on the manual Olivetti I inherited from my father, I learned what I never imagined about writing. Not the craft or creative part. The manual labor.

If I had to write a guide about how my father produced several books on this mean machine, one or two sentence chapters are the most Olivetti will get out of me because my patience isn't close to the length of it's red and black spool of typewriter ribbon.

Prologue

Don't hunt for these keys on a manual typewriter. They don't exist. a) Italics, b) Em dash, c) Bold, or d) Center spacing. Keep your pages peppered with letters of the alphabet and punctuation.

Chapter One

The machine slides around the desk from punching the keys hard just to get a good ink imprint. Allow time every third sentence or so to re-align the typewriter on your desk.

Chapter Two

The 's' key sticks.

Chapter Three

Best of all: A bell rings when you get a few letters away from the right margin, then the keys lock, a forced decision to either hit the return bar, or the big save: use the release key to by-pass the margin.

Chapter Four

Part I

A hazard: The eraser. Its shredded rubber bits fall into the typewriter guts. That can't be good.

Chapter Four

Part II

Would you want the shredded evidence of your mistakes tossed as gummy bits into your guts? No, I didn't think so.

Afterword

Apple devotes billions of labor hours and dollars and beads of sweat to improve its processor speeds from i3 to i5 and now the new generation, i7. Where's Olivetti in all this? What happened to their marketing and branding campaigns, and why not a release of O7? It's time to capture a new generation of typewriter writers.

Reader's Guide for Book Clubs

When you last produced writing on a typewriter, if you've ever done so, was it before or after your first sexual experience, or maybe during? Manual or otherwise -- for either one. Which do you recall with more enthusiasm, the sex or the typewriter? Discuss.

Acknowledgments

Praise to Mr. and Ms. Olivetti and their sons. Sons, because in those days only sons took over family businesses but today...come on, Daughters, step up and step in. Let's rekindle the typewriter business.

