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Writer's Block

and it's not my fault this time

Robin Armstrong

My computer doesn't want me to be a successful writer. It taunts me with its "technology." It sits in judgment, teasing me with its white screen, flashing cursor, and screen-saving programs. I want my beautifully simple typewriter back. I remember my typewriter with great fondness. It never criticized, teased, or tormented me. It just sat, patient and welcoming, like an electronic grandmother. Sure, sometimes we wouldn't get on that well, but that's to be expected in any long-term relationship. My typewriter understood my simple needs and fulfilled them with a willingness that certain machines (I won't name names) refuse to accept.

Getting started used to be so easy; all one needed was a blank piece of paper and the lovely typewriter turned on. Is it so difficult to be turned on? A simple flip of one switch used to do the trick nicely, but noooooo. Now we have to have a power strip with seventeen thousand plugs stuffed into it. We are challenged to risk certain electrocution by daring to reach our trembling hands into the murky depths of technology and trip the toggle to the "on" position.

OK, the power strip is on. You would think you'd be able to start writing now, wouldn't you? With most humble machines, turning on the power source usually suffices, now, doesn't it? Well, not for our circuit snob. After braving the power strip, next you have to figure out how to turn on the hard drive, the screen, and the printer. Now, if any of those words cause flashes of warm fuzzies, then you might be reading the wrong paper. If, however, you either

- A. furrowed your brow in confusion at those wretched words, or
- B. have suddenly remembered the series of foul names and epithets you have for those particular devices,

then, by all means, read on, MacDuff.

The hard drive is the big box that controls the computer. If you're as completely computer stupid as I am, you believe the screen, the part that looks like a TV, controls the computer. Oh, no, my friend. The screen is nothing more than a display unit, something to stare back at you, continually reminding you that you're a computer failure. The hard drive is that deceptively simple-looking box with only one or two buttons on it. Do not be taken in by its rectangular design and quiet humming, for it is the true demon of the night: a modernized soul sucker trying to drag you down into the depths of computer literacy hell, where all your friends have vanished into "The Net," one by one.

Remembering my warning, you reach over and push that oh-so-innocent-looking button, turning on the hard-drive devil. Your next step is to turn on the screen. If you look at the bottom right hand corner of your monitor (that's fancy computer talk for the TV-looking screen), there on the underside of the monitor should be a switch. Don't worry. This one is almost nice compared to you-know-who over there. After the screen flickers to life, your nightmare will begin. You cannot simply start typing now. No, you have to go to the right screen, then the correct program, then you have to start a new project. This list of "user friendly" steps goes on and on.

Finally, the nightmare of technology leads you to the point where I am currently sitting: in front of a blank computer screen, cursor blinking

expectantly, thinking back fondly to the good old days of my IBM electric, and putting off starting this paper for as long as possible. It's all the computer's fault. If this was a simple typewriter, this paper would be done. But I do remember turning on that typewriter, putting in a crisp piece of paper and staring at it for hours on end, waiting for divine inspiration. Well, maybe the computer isn't so bad after all. At least here I can sneak over to the games section and play solitaire until something to write about comes to me. (My typewriter didn't have a solitaire program.) Come to think of it, a quick game of solitaire might be just the thing right now, and I promise I'll play one game and one game only.

Interview with **Kathy Hopkins**, AN ACADEMIC ADVISOR.

QUESTION: HOW DO YOU UNCOVER STUDENTS' INTERESTS?

"I THINK IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO BE A GOOD LISTENER. IF A STUDENT INDICATES AN INTEREST IN ART I TRY TO EXPLORE WHAT THE STUDENT HOPES TO DO WITH IT. I AM AN ADVOCATE OF, 'IF YOU HAVE AN INTEREST IN SOMETHING, TAKE A CLASS IN IT AND EXPLORE THAT INTEREST.' YOUR DREAM ... CAN BE ... DIFFERENT THAN THE REALITY OF ... CAREERS. ALWAYS PURSUE YOUR INTERESTS. IF YOU PURSUE SOMETHING YOU REALLY LOVE ... THEN [YOU] CAN MAKE A LIVING FROM IT AS WELL."