

## Sheila Lowe

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Jeanette Farmer and I were interviewed for this article, which features Vimala Rodgers.

Sheila

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# THE MONTHLY

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## Feature

# Character Building

*Handwriting offers powerful insights into personality and even therapeutic benefits.*

*But will this ancient art survive the computer age?*

By Christine Schoefer

The last thing you wrote by hand was probably a check. But a long personal letter? Why bother?

Sometimes it seems as if handwriting may be going the way of the LP. Speed-obsessed as we are, we'd rather text-message in cryptic shorthand to our friends than dash off a note by hand. Soon we'll all be paying our bills online, and pens will only be used to jot down the occasional shopping list or reminder to spouse and kids.

Technically, touching pen to paper to shape words counts as handwriting—but it's a far stretch from the practice of inking arches, loops, and curves across a sheet of paper. So infrequently do most of us sit down and handwrite a letter or journal entry that handwriting has become an anachronism. Only four percent of all mail was handwritten in 1993, the Postal Service reports, and we can be sure that this figure has gone down, not up.

But there is something romantic about the act of handwriting. Think of movie scenes that depict Shakespeare laboring over a manuscript with ink-stained fingers, Virginia Woolf perched on her couch with pen and notebook, Iris Murdoch transcribing her ideas at her cluttered desk. In an age of ultra-light keyboards and Blackberrys, these images convey a sense of authenticity, as though the act of moving the hand across the paper was more closely allied with inspiration and creativity.

Our country's former poet laureate, Berkeley resident Robert Hass, agrees that it might be. While he types newspaper columns on the computer, he writes his first drafts of poetry by hand because he likes "the intimacy in the process." Hass finds that the physical activity of writing "connects the head and the brain, and the heart and the brain."

A pragmatist might argue that like mending socks or shaving with a straightedge razor, handwriting should naturally become obsolete. If communication is possible by more efficient means than longhand—print, fax, computer, cell phone—all the better. Content is what matters, form is irrelevant. But there are handwriting advocates—both sentimental and professional—who say that every time we hit a keyboard instead of moving a pen, we forfeit the opportunity to create something of beauty, to

Handwritten headline and subhead created by local artist and calligrapher Lauren McIntosh, who has created special menus for Chez Panisse when the Dalai Lama and Bill Clinton came there to dine. When she sits down to work, McIntosh clears space in her mind. "I have to have the universe with me, so that I don't make a mistake."

*THREE FIGURES FOR A SUNRISE IN SUMMER*  
*Three Dawn Songs.*

*1*

*The first shadows on the lawn  
are like mortal difficulty.  
The first bird song is not like that at all.*

*2*

*The light in summer is very young  
and wholly unshared.  
No one has made it sit down to breakfast.  
It's the first one up, the first one out.*

*3*

*Because he has opened his eyes,  
he must be light, and she, sleeping beside him,  
one ringlet of hair curled about her ear,  
must be the visible. To whom he whispers,  
"Wake up!" nuzzles her neck, nuzzles  
her most, ~~color~~ coral-colored ear.  
"Wake up," he whispers.*

Poetry in motion: A former U.S. poet laureate, Robert Hass (pictured below) wrote this first draft of "Three Dawn Songs" by hand, even changing the title. Hass writes all first drafts of his poetry this way, finding that the physical act of writing "connects the head and the brain, and the heart and the brain."

connect our hands and our brain, our mind and our body, even to shape our character.

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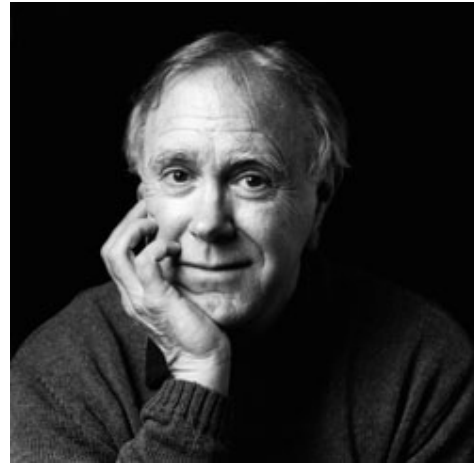
Vimala Rodgers's love of handwriting and letters goes back to her childhood. Notes and lists fascinated her and by the time she was 13, she had collected a file cabinet full of them. Letters of the alphabet intrigued her. In addition to immersing herself in graphology, Rodgers, who has a Ph.D. in religious studies, researched every alphabet in the world, including Sanskrit.

"The alphabet," she asserts, "is a spiritual tradition. Every letter has a history, like a rune. And as symbols, letters represent certain qualities or attributes. Some have been around for centuries, others are relatively new." After 30 years of research and designing, Rodgers, an alphabetician who lives and teaches in Nevada City, created a new script. Her Vimala Alphabet, she says, brings out the "unique and powerful energy" that each letter contains. While graphologists study handwriting to draw conclusions about an individual's personality, and document examiners use handwriting to verify identity, alphabeticians actively engage with the act of writing by hand itself. According to Rodgers, character traits can actually be transformed by learning to write differently.

For Rodgers, handwriting is not just a reflection of personality, but an opportunity. In her book, *Your Handwriting Can Change Your Life* (Simon & Schuster, 2000), she asserts that people can change self-defeating aspects of their personality by altering specific strokes in their handwriting. According to Rodgers, this approach works because every time we change our writing patterns we reconfigure the neural pathways in the brain that record our self-image. "Every attitude is contained in your handwriting," she says, "so if you want to pay attention to your life, you pay attention to your handwriting."

Her handwriting technology doesn't try to shape a person's personality but works by inviting the qualities that are contained in the individual letters into your life. For example, the letter *a* represents "the willingness to be center stage setting personality aside and letting spirit shine through," says Rodgers. "The letters *m*, *n*, and *h* represent fearlessness."

The Vimala Alphabet (shown on page 3) is a template script that can be used as a guideline



Handy: Poet Robert Hass likes the "intimacy" of writing first drafts by hand. Photo ©2001, Margareta K. Mitchell.

by anyone who wants to make changes in their life. Once they've mastered it, their "genius" shines through the letters they form, Rodgers says. "Every time you move the pen, you are acknowledging your spiritual side and accessing your soul," she says. She laughs when she calls her Parker "Jotter" pen her spiritual teacher. But this is more than a joke—she really is convinced that handwriting has transformative powers.

Rodgers's script is used in 49 countries around the world and she herself has taught the technique to thousands of people in workshops. A woman who teaches it in ESL classes in San Francisco reported to Rodgers that one of her students said, "Teacher, when I write like this I feel like I am praying." Zen priest Ed Brown of Fairfax adopted the Vimala Alphabet in 1995. When he changed the way he made his lowercase *f* to the one Rodgers designed—which she says helps the writer with "using one's talents in the service of others"—several things shifted in his life. He finished and published a book that he had been working on for seven years; he bought a house; and he received a calling to become a Zen priest.

"The mind and the body are connected in the hand," Brown says. "When the hand moves in new ways, consciousness changes." Brown uses the Vimala Alphabet at the Green Gulch Zen Center in Marin in a course called "Liberation Through Handwriting."

Berkeley resident, Lorri Holt, an actress who has worked in Bay Area theater for 25 years, took Brown's workshop a year ago and then practiced the Vimala Alphabet on her own for 40 days, as recommended. "Just about everything in my life has changed since then," she says. "I broke up my relationship, got a grant to travel to Paris, got my real estate license, and moved. I think a little differently. I ask more for what I want."

How can she be sure that these changes are a result of her handwriting practice? "I will never really know whether it's connected or not," she acknowledges, "but I strongly suspect that there's something there." In response to those skeptics who question whether the changes in their life have to do with writing her script, Rodgers says, "Change your handwriting back to what it was before and see what happens." As far as she knows, no one has done so.

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In public schools today, penmanship no longer

plays the important role it once did. Computers, the rejection of repetitive drills as a teaching tool, and government testing that focuses on core subjects such as reading and math, have relegated handwriting to the background. California elementary schools still teach printing in first grade and cursive in third. But in practice, few teachers dwell on the intricate skills involved in learning cursive writing and most are happy if their students learn to print with pencil or ballpoint pen. In upper grades, teachers accept any legible form of writing. At Berkeley High School, most teachers insist on typed papers.

Indeed, cursive writing is a challenging skill to master. Perhaps you remember your own effort: gripping the pencil tightly, brow knit in concentration, tongue sticking out. In an effort to make it easier on students, some elementary schools have instituted a new cursive curriculum called *Handwriting Without Tears*.

Occupational therapist Jan Olsen, who lives in Maryland, developed this curriculum. She says it features a stripped-down script without "curlicues and frou-frou stuff." But critics say it's taken healthy challenges out of learning to write.

Vimala Rodgers finds the *Handwriting Without Tears* script appalling. "That handwriting puts thinking in a box," she says. "It is not open, not free. If you did that handwriting you would not be touching your soul." She cannot fathom how someone in their right mind could ask a child to write like this. Why not teach a beautiful script? Indeed, why not learn one that "allows you to reconnect with a deep place within and express a unique relationship outwardly?"

Pamela Hollings, a teacher at the East Bay Waldorf School, wonders why "easy" has become a value in itself. "There seems to be a consensus among some parents," she says, "that their children should be spared any kind of hardship. They complain when their child experiences frustration with a project. But actually, the child needs to go through this experience. This is what gives them the challenge." Hollings insists that learning to write cursive has an important place in education.

Typing with both hands does not engage the brain the same way. She teaches printing in relation to reading at the beginning of second grade. Later in the second grade, when the children have developed the requisite motor

skills, Hollings teaches regular cursive. "Not an easy task," she admits. "I actually had to practice writing beautiful script on the blackboard when I became a teacher."

Rita Davies, a teacher at Oxford Elementary School in Berkeley, devotes a semester in her second- and third-grade class to cursive writing. "I don't know whether the kids will actually use it," Davies says, but I teach it because it has a place in the bigger picture, like playing a musical instrument – or painting a picture."

Berkeley artist Elisabeth Alexander has volunteered in Davies's classroom for the last three years to teach cursive the old-fashioned way, with fountain pens and special notebooks that she brings from her native Germany. For at least two hours every week, she shows each child how to shape the letters. Once they have learned this, they can work efficiently and with ease to connect letters in a pleasing way.

"I don't know about brain research but I can see that something happens with the kids," she observes. "They love it. When they are practicing, they calm down and everything else falls away. It is almost meditative." In teaching penmanship, Alexander believes that she is conveying the bigger lesson that humans have the ability to make life into art. "I believe that we are here to create beauty whether we write, eat, or interact with others," she says.

Research confirms these educators' premise: When we write by hand we access a specific part of the brain. If you are right-handed, it leaves the left brain free to roam in thought. Putting pen to paper in writing is also important because it establishes and maintains fine motor skills and creates and reinforces neural pathways in the brain.

Denver-based handwriting researcher Jeanette Farmer is one of just a few "handwriting remediation" specialists in this country. She references the work of the late German neurologist/graphologist Dr. Rudolph Pophal, who determined that handwriting has a physiological and psychological link in the brain, and she has developed handwriting exercises and therapeutic music programs for children with learning disabilities, autism, and brain injury. Writing, she says, uniquely engages the brain.

Interactive in a way that reading and mathematics are not, she says, writing causes

"bottom-up processing to influence top-down processing—a function of the prefrontal lobes. This neural connection alone gives handwriting its highly specialized power to impact the entire brain." As a sensory-motor process, Farmer argues, the "old-fashioned penmanship" now out of favor in public schools is simply unequaled in developing impulse control and emotional self-control.

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Even if our culture sees handwriting as an anachronism—the domain of grandmothers and idiosyncratic writers—it wasn't always that way. For centuries, writing by hand was a venerable craft practiced only by individuals of a certain status. In monasteries, monks would sit perched at simple wooden tables, copying religious texts. Their work was practical and sublime.

Every stroke of the pen was a meditation and an adoration, and drawing a single letter could take days—think of the illuminated characters that initiate text passages. Up until the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, scholars, poets, and statesmen were handwriting lavish and embellished script with quill and ink. Old documents are fine works of art, alive with the personality of the scribes who penned them.

But the history of handwriting is somewhat paradoxical: Just as technological advances democratized writing and made it available to all of us, it has lately been threatened by progress and by a cultural reverence for speed and efficiency.

In her book *Handwriting in America: A Cultural History* (Yale University Press, 1996), historian Tamara Plakins Thornton traces the history of penmanship. She shows that the contest between speed and utility on the one hand, and form and beauty on the other, began to affect handwriting as soon as the medium of print established itself. Thornton shows that during colonial times, when basic reading skills were taught to many young people (but by no means all) as a "universal spiritual necessity," writing was still reserved for a select few.

"It was generally believed," she states, "that African Americans, Native Americans, humble whites, and women did not need to know how to write." Penmanship was considered a business skill, usually taught together with arithmetic and accounting. Upper-class boys were instructed by private writing masters as part of their

"mercantile training." If their sisters learned writing at all, it was paired with embroidery, dancing, and music. Those who did learn how to write were expected to master several different scripts. Penmanship workbooks of the era include an entire range of "hands," some of them markers of a specific occupation, or class, or gender.

In the course of the 19th century, penmanship became more simplified. In the Victorian era, boys and girls learned the same basics, but thereafter pursued separate curricula. Boys learned a fast and legible script, which prepared them for their entry into the business world. Girls copied maxims and poems in small and painstakingly shaded epistolary, in preparation for "proper letter writing and calling card etiquette," Thornton writes.

While the spread of printed media pushed the necessity of handwriting aside, it also brought its meaning into focus. Increasingly, cursive became associated with individual personality. Print was considered impersonal, "opaque, even duplicitous" while handwriting was personal, "transparent, and sincere." In the 18th century, Thornton explains, handwriting was a form of "self-presentation." In the 19th century, its structure and design became a form of self-expression.

For generations, handwriting was associated with the process of personal character formation, which was to be achieved by using the will to master the body (which was, according to Thornton, defined as a specifically masculine process). That changed in the 1880s, when Austin Norman Palmer developed the script that we all learned in school. Palmer promoted his lettering as "modern writing," whose plain and rapid style was better suited to "the rush of business." By the 1890s it had replaced the more flourished and decorative Spencerian lettering. The change reflected a shift in attitude about penmanship. Spencer, a Victorian writing master who designed his script in the late 1840s, felt that handwriting should be seen as a process of mental training and physical self-mastery. Some 40 years later, Palmer saw it as a matter of drill and habit—a "form of athleticism."

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Today, calligraphers preserve the art of handwriting for all of us. Local artist Lauren McIntosh has handwritten Chez Panisse menus



for the Dalai Lama and Bill Clinton when they came to dine.

McIntosh's calligraphy is steeped in memories of her grandmother who was always writing in pen and ink, and taught the girl cursive at a very young age. As an adult, McIntosh, who is co-owner of the gift and collectible shop Tail of the Yak in Berkeley, created her own distinctive lettering by collecting bits and pieces of various scripts. "When I went to European antique shows for the store," she explains, "I saw many documents and I copied the letter shapes that I liked." Her calligraphy developed gradually, as she made signs and tags for the store.

Like any artwork, calligraphy is a result of grace as well as ability. When she sits down to work, McIntosh clears space in her mind. "I have to have the universe with me," she says, "so that I don't make a mistake." Mistakes can be costly. Sometimes they can be repaired by flourishing them, but often she has to begin from scratch. Once, when she returned to a just-finished piece of work, she noticed tiny lines crisscrossing the page. A spider had walked on the paper and dragged the ink around.

In the United States, calligraphy is mostly a women's art. In Chinese culture, however, men and women both practice calligraphy. Dr. Alex Feng, a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine, director of the Taoist Center in Oakland, and himself a calligrapher, says that in China, "everyone who considers him- or herself a scholar or intellectual or artist (and that includes martial artists), practices calligraphy." It is considered an expression of beauty as well as a reflection of character. "Chinese calligraphy," Feng explains, "shows whether you have 'bones.' That is, fundamental structure and character, and it reflects your flow of chi, life energy."

Strokes express many different character traits that are a reflection of nature, for example boldness, swirl, fluidity ("the continuity of sectionalized bamboo"), knobiness ("like an enduring oak tree"). A single stroke can contain six gradations of coloring, heavy to light. But calligraphy is more than skill and art. Each piece expresses individual personality, Feng explains. "To show your calligraphy is to expect critique as a person and on your aesthetics." A single stroke of the brush or the pen tells Feng, who is also a Tai Chi master, how much chi a person can hold and express.

In the West, it is the graphologists who infer an individual's nature by analyzing their handwriting. These handwriting experts proceed from the assumption that once an individual has developed "writing maturity"—when they write so fluently that they no longer have to think about shaping individual letters or words—their writing comes to express their personality. In order to detect a writer's personality traits, contemporary graphologists look at individual letters (the character of the loops, angles, and curves), as well as the writing as a whole (the spatial arrangements, the movement, rhythm, and pressure of the writing).

The size of the letters, according to graphological theory, is related to the individual's self-estimation: Small letters suggest modesty or inferiority, large letters indicate self-confidence or even dominance. The slant is related to emotional states and may vary in one person from day to day (right slant is associated with warmth, passion, irritability; left slant with restraint, denial, even coldness). The writing speed reveals temperament, while spacing between letters and words is an indicator of emotional distance.

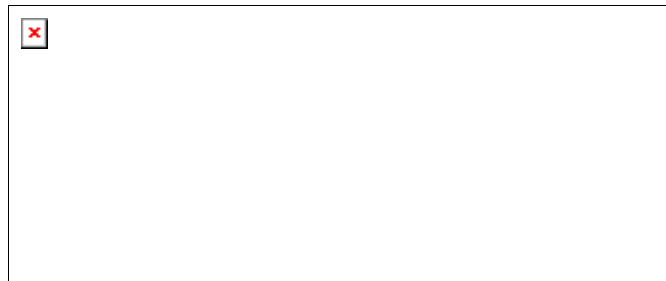
Handwriting expert Sheila Lowe, author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Handwriting Analysis* (Alpha Press, 1999) and *Handwriting of the Famous and Infamous* (Metro Books, 2001), lives in Southern California. She has analyzed thousands of handwriting samples in more than 30 years of professional experience. "My work is not like voodoo or looking at a crystal ball," she says. "Handwriting is as characteristic of an individual as tone of voice, body language, and facial expression."

If a person is very expansive and outgoing, explains Lowe, their handwriting is going to be large. If they are shy, it is going to be small and cramped off to the left side of the paper. Mother Teresa's script is very large and round, indicating her caring for other people as well as her ability to draw attention to her causes. Charles Manson's handwriting is extremely crowded, ragged-looking, and highly disorganized, full of warning signs.

Lowe has trained bankers in basic forgery detection; employers who need to sift through a pile of job applications; law enforcement officials who want to determine the legitimacy of victim, witness, or perpetrator statements; private detectives running background checks; and attorneys who are drawing up character



Open hand: In Chinese culture the way a person writes reveals their character, says Dr. Alex Feng, here practicing Qi Gong. Photo courtesy Dr. Alex Feng



Two hands: The Chinese character for Tao, or "the path," written by Dr. Alex Feng. The larger images are the same letter in "grass script," the equivalent of cursive. Boxed is the same character in "standard writing," similar to printing in the Roman alphabet.

profiles, for example, in child custody cases. Individuals come to her to find out whether their fiancé really is compatible or what's going on with their children.

"When someone asks me for a third-party analysis," she says, "I always require them to send a sample of their own handwriting, so I can get an idea of their motivation."

Again and again, she has found that handwriting gives accurate information, but people don't always take it into account when making their decisions. She, too, has disregarded the clues she saw in handwriting. When Lowe saw her future husband's writing on their first date, she knew instantly what would be problematic in the relationship. She married him anyway—and has been divorced from him twice.

A personal tragedy in Lowe's life highlighted the power of graphology and ultimately led her to it as a profession. Her adult daughter's boyfriend, a law enforcement officer, asked Lowe to analyze his handwriting. Even though she knew him to be a nice guy, she noticed pathological signs—"a potential for explosive behavior and a tendency to be highly authoritarian." She also saw signs of a serious head injury in his past, which he confirmed. Her daughter dated this man for almost a year. When she broke off the relationship, he shot and killed her and then turned his gun on himself.

Does this story put graphology in the domain of predictive occult arts, like palm reading and crystal ball gazing? No, says Lowe, who has talked with law enforcement agencies, since losing her daughter, about institutionalizing graphology in their hiring procedures.

Graphology has played a role in a few high-profile court cases—the Lindbergh kidnapping case in the 1920s, the O.J. Simpson case (the so-called suicide letter), and in the murder case of Jon-Benet Ramsey (the supposed ransom note).

But graphology has its limits. Lowe cautions that it "reflects potential at the time of writing and it gives clues about past behavior," but it "cannot *predict* behavior." It can be useful in employment decisions, for example, because it can screen out those people who interview well but have hidden pathological or physiological issues that turn up in handwriting. That's why French and German employers often request handwritten autobiographical essays as part of a job application.

Handwriting reveals an individual's state of mind and since it is a physiological process, it can also be an indicator of physical health. Calligrapher McIntosh tells the story of her neighbor, whose husband became concerned when his wife's handwriting suddenly changed drastically. At his urging, she went to a doctor and was diagnosed with a brain tumor.

When President Reagan informed the American public of his affliction with Alzheimer's disease in a handwritten public statement in 1994, the writing itself poignantly brought the reality of that disease into focus. Edmund Morris wrote in the *New Yorker*, "After years of studying him with objective coldness, I confess that I, too, cried at that letter, with its crabbed script and its enormous margins (so evocative of the blizzard whitening his mind)."

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While graphology is a relatively new science, handwriting analysts have been around as long as forgery has been lucrative. Peter Barnett, a forensic scientist specializing in criminalistics with Forensic Science Associates in Richmond, is occasionally called upon as a handwriting analyst. He outlined a typical scenario: a father dies, one brother claims to have a document that is a last will and testament, and the other brother contests this document. In this case, Barnett would compare the signature on that document with other signature and writing samples to determine whether it is authentic. Such a comparison is not as simple as it sounds, because there is more to the art of forging than the shape of the letters. The line quality is crucial. Barnett explains why. "Signatures are usually written rapidly and automatically, some of us write them thousands of times in our life. A copied signature will show slowness and irregularity, abrupt starts and stops of the pen, a fixing up of mistakes."

Does this remind you of the painstaking labor of imitating your mother's handwriting on high school absentee notes? Alas, forgery-like handwriting—is not the art that it used to be. Nowadays, the forger does not care about a possible comparison of signatures. And why should he? How often do you actually see a sales clerk comparing your autograph on a receipt with the one on your credit card? In today's business transactions, pin codes have taken the place of signatures, making fraud much easier. "Why," Barnett asks rhetorically, "do you think credit card theft has become a

\$10 billion a year business?"

Unexpectedly, handwriting also has a place in the virtual world of high-tech gaming. Dr. Francesca Barrientos researched the application of writing by hand as a potential link between humans and machines, while a graduate student at U.C. Berkeley. Handwriting, she says, could allow players of online games to personalize the movements of the game's characters (called "avatars" in gaming vernacular). In many games, the user clicks on a button to make their avatar move but can't change the movement to express an emotion, like dancing excitedly. Barrientos, who now works as a research scientist for NASA Ames Research Center at Moffett Field, explains that by using handwritten commands, the computer can actually extract the expressive content from the handwriting and translate it to the avatar.

If Barrientos's idea works, then the way the avatar moves could be as expressive and individual as the users are in real life. Users could, potentially, make a gesture or movement that's sad one time and excited another.

While Barrientos discounts handwriting analysis as a kind of parlor trick ("You can't really tell if someone is a great lover or a loyal worker from their handwriting," she says), she agrees that handwriting is unique for each individual and expresses particular emotional states.

"If we can measure those features and somehow translate them into how the avatar moves," she says, "then the moves will be more individualized, like handwriting."

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Barrientos's research is not likely to spawn a resurrection of the venerable practice of handwriting. But there are writers who stick steadfastly to pen-and-paper over keyboards and monitors, at least at certain stages of their writing.

Gloria Lenhart, author of *Planet Widow*, prefers longhand for her first drafts because "there are fewer distractions when sitting at the kitchen table with a pad and pencil and it's much more comfortable, allowing thoughts to flow more easily." Vimala Rodgers handwrites all of her books because she feels she is accessing a different part of the brain. Jackie Collins writes in longhand and has the finished manuscripts bound in leather.

But what about the rest of us? The nonwriters among us would do well to remember that Miss Manners insists on the handwritten thank-you note as a basic form of courtesy.

Joyce Mende Wong, program coordinator for Second Start Adult Literacy Program in Oakland reports that some people have stated writing cursive as their literacy goal. "For some people, it is something they have always wanted to learn," she explains. "Cursive writing makes these students feel accomplished because it's something that people with lots of education do."

Calligraphers are paid to handwrite wedding invitations in beautiful script. Small businesses handwrite thank-you notes for those who have neither the time nor the skill. Fund-raising campaigns rely on the personal touch of handwriting. Mass-mail campaigns simulate that personal touch with computer-generated cursive typefaces. So handwriting has its place. But this hardly means that it is part of most people's daily life.

Before we dispense with handwriting altogether, says Hollings of the East Bay Waldorf School, we should consider the costs. "Sure we can decide, as a society to become more machine-like and mechanistic," she says. "This is, in essence, the decision we are making when we choose to eliminate cursive handwriting from our lives." Learning handwriting is one of those childhood activities, like tree climbing, doing household chores, and walking to school, that instills certain skills and values in children. It activates the brain and allows children to express themselves—like learning to play a musical instrument or drawing pictures.

Robert Hass anticipates a cultural loss because young poets and writers who type directly into a computer don't usually keep early drafts of a written piece. "What about the history of the genesis of a piece of writing?" he worries. "What about the early thoughts that get lost?"

Perhaps we have come full circle. As in earlier times, when knowing how to write was a hard-won and powerful tool, writing by hand has a certain cachet and appeal. The few who practice this craft are consciously choosing to hold and express certain values. They strive for beauty. They use it as a moment of mediation. And they preserve the art of individual expression in the small acts of daily life for all of us.

"Our handwriting," writes Vimala Rodgers, "is more than a succession of words put together to create a means of communication. It is a map of our attitude towards life, a labyrinthine pathway to long-forgotten hiding places inside, a diagram of our unconscious mind."

Christine Schoefer, who always sketches out first drafts longhand, is working on making her handwriting beautiful. She has contributed to local and national publications, including *The Nation*, *Salon*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She is a regular contributor to *The Monthly*

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