



The *Undo* Button

As a ten-year-old, I taught myself to type on my father's well-travelled Underwood portable typewriter. My typing style was (and still is) the "hunt-and-peck" method, used by my father and by his father before him. Over the years, my keyboard skills improved enough to serve me well as I earned a living and did other writing such as articles and papers, books and poetry.

But I labored mightily in the days before electronic word processing. Typing a paper for Mrs. Buskirk's AHS English class was wearisome. I would read a finished page only to discover misspellings or omissions that required retyping the page.

The later inventions of "erasing tape" and "white out" didn't help me much because of the sheer scope of my errors and omissions. (Sometimes I wonder if the fumes from all that correction fluid I used altered my brain chemistry just a wee bit!)

But *halleluiah!* electronic word processing not only changed keyboarding for me but writing in general. As I happily bid farewell to the mechanical typewriter my typing speed increased remarkably. Never mind "typos" and misspellings: my computer's spelling and grammar checkers will save the day. If I type "horrendious" my machine suggests *horrendous* and replaces the misspelled word at the click of a mouse.

If I don't like what I see on my computer screen, I can wipe out words or paragraphs or whole pages in a flash—or rearrange text by "cutting and pasting." I can also change the type **font** in a flash. I can "import" and incorporate text from other documents or from Internet sources. Footnotes and citations are easily added, unlike in my High School days of tedious typing and retyping.

I still make copious typing and other errors, including unintentionally deleting something. But I have a rescuer: the *undo* button. It's not really a button, it's a computer screen icon of an arrow pointing counterclockwise. When I say, "Oops! I didn't want to delete that!" a click of my trusty mouse will *undo* the damage. There are even ways to undo some kinds of file deletions and retrieve "lost" documents.

No doubt I am more relaxed at the keyboard and my mind is freer to be creative because so many of the problems of producing a document (electronic or paper) have been eliminated or minimized. I can focus my attention on content and style, what I want to say and how I want to say it.

Of course, I am still *responsible* for what I say and write and do. I confess, there have been times when I would have welcomed a *Life* undo button that let me "take back" words I said or undo deeds I've done or make something I wrote disappear into some nether gloom never to be seen again. Alas, there is no such button. Unlike the words on a computer screen which can be changed or erased at electronic speed, the effects of what we say and do (for good or ill) are to be found firmly embedded in our lives and in the lives of others around us.

My youngest daughter tells me there are many movies about going back in time and changing "the future." I suppose I may have seen such a film at one time or another but it could not have been particularly memorable or I would recall it. The theme of such films doesn't particularly interest me.

For the most part, I have learned to accept the results of my years of living. And precisely because there is no *Life* undo button I am more circumspect with my words and deeds. Everyone does the best she or he knows how under the circumstances. Notice I say *knows how*, not *can*. In this lies hope: We *can* learn a *new* knowhow. And circumstances are both external (seen) *and* internal (unseen). We cannot know what inner circumstances burden the hearts of our fellow human beings. Thus compassion is in order lest we say or do something only to find ourselves searching for the undo button.