

## Keyboards and Books

By Pete Clark

I approach a keyboard using the Columbus Method. I search for and land on the key I need. Using the Columbus Method is a bit like walking through a dark alley, stumbling over random bits of debris. I took typing in high school, but it did me no good. I needed to type thirty words per minute to complete the course. I typed twenty-nine and  $\frac{3}{5}$  words per minute to pass the final exam. A classmate typed twenty-nine and  $\frac{2}{5}$  words per minute and flunked. We are now well into the Twenty-First Century and I still use the Columbus Method to type. The difference is that instead of writing words with ink on paper, I digitize them and they stare back at me from a glowing display, but they are not any wiser.

Ever expanding technology has been a boon to humanity in a plethora of ways that affect every facet of our lives, rendering many lifelong practices obsolete. For instance, consider that tried and true source of verbiage, the dictionary. For most of my life when I came to a word that was foreign to me, I could count on Webster for guidance. I could open the tome, turn to the word's first letter, then the second letter, etc., until I was looking at the complete word. I would see its pronunciation, definition, use and often its root. I could also determine the difference between words like dear and deer. One of them is an animal. When I read, a dictionary was always nearby. Now the book is seldom needed.

Before I downsized into Windsor Gardens, I bought a laptop and deep-sixed my tower and its space-hogging monitor. I have the laptop set up on a typing table which I have had since long before the age of digitization. The typing table has a narrow lower shelf, originally intended as a resting place for typing paper. The shelf now holds a stack of books relevant to my wordsmithing. The foundation of the stack is *The CIA World Fact Book 2017*, then *The Chicago Manual of Style*, and at the top of the stack, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. My World Atlas is too large for the shelf, so it resides on the coffee table.

I have been using dictionaries since my grade school years, but I am now less dependent on bound books. When I write, I bring up a search engine and let it do the walking that my fingers once did, but a problem has come to the fore. Even as my ability to build letters into proper words has declined, as has my knowledge of synonyms and antonyms, my dependence on Webster has bottomed out. Webster's Word Mine appears to feel jilted with the end of a long love affair. The dictionary swooned, falling from the top of the stack and peeling six inches of skin off of my lower leg. The book slid to the floor, open to the page containing the word *scoundrel*.