

Just My Typewriter

Dear Mr. Tom Hanks,

I recently watched your documentary California Typewriter in which you, and other collectors, explain the personal value you associate with typewriters. To be fair, I was an easy sell as I am a huge fan of your work and of old things. This film, along with some encouragement of a friend who also was interested in typewriters, encouraged me to dive in to the thrilling market of typewriters. I want to thank you for that inspiration, not only in the way of typewriters, but also as a constant reminder, through your films, that things get better.

I grew up loving movies like The Terminal and Cast Away and cannot tell you how many times my mother and I watched You've Got Mail when it was late, and we couldn't sleep. Your characters, always different, but somehow all holding the same amount of Hanksian charm, always found a way to make the best out of situations that could be stressful or disheartening. As I've gotten older, I still find the optimism that you infuse into every character contagious. I've never left one of these films, which I often revisit, feeling worse about the world. That can be a difficult thing to remember when the world is often full of stressors and the self-imposed expectations that come with being a full time student in a Master's degree program. I am also a lover of old things. I watch old movies, drive a broken car from the 80s, and constantly wear flannels that I pick up in secondhand shops. When I saw your documentary about these people who find and save these fantastic machines, I knew that I was about to be hooked. I've never considered myself a writer, but it didn't matter. I saw how you and others loved and cared for these machines, and I needed to have one. I found a 1964 Smith-Corona Corsair Deluxe. I bought her and immediately named her Caroline. I can't even express the kind of joy and fulfillment comes from being able to slow myself down, think about what I want to say, and just write. I'm not trying to write for anyone else, but being able to express myself in a manual way. It doesn't need to be saved anywhere; it doesn't need to be published or posted to exist. By writing a passage on a typewriter, I can will into existence thoughts and feelings that have gone through the physical process of being formulated into real words, un-spell-checked, and shocked through a plastic key that moves a hammer to tap out these very thoughts in ink. As my final project in my Master's level Communications Media Production class, I've been tasked with

creating a collection of media productions based on a singular topic. I have chosen to dive headfirst into typewriter examination. I've had to create several videos featuring typewriter related products, a few podcasts, and several articles that would further inform a typewriter novice like myself. I've found this to be an exercise in expression as well as a meditated examination of what I find so interesting about these machines. It's also forcing me to write using my Smith Corona on a daily basis which I have found to be a most useful exercise.

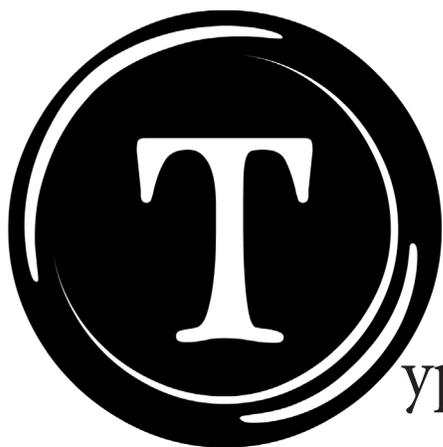
I wanted to thank you for being a positive influence in my personal history and for directing me toward this fascinating universe of typewriter collection and appreciation. I may have gotten there eventually, but by having your film act as an inciting incident in this plot, I am now deeply entrenched in a culture which I love. It can be so easy to get lost in the daily aspects of life that often seem so heavy, but by taking a step back and appreciating the little things like glass top keys or the different sounding dings carriage returns make on different models or even the fact that you can type out a whole document on a typewriter and never need to hit the print button, I have found a daily reminder that not everything has to be so serious. Thank you for taking the time to create for the rest of us.

Sincerely,

*Sarah E.*

Sarah E.





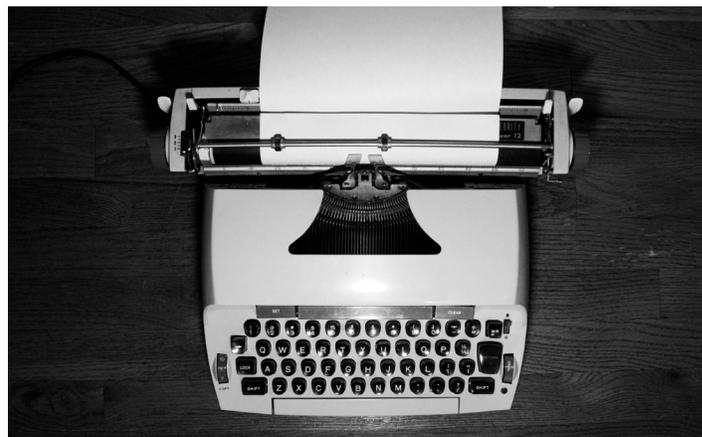
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## An Introduction

I recently purchased a 1964 Corsair-Deluxe Smith Corona Typewriter for my 22 birthday. I was hoping to find something inspiring to encourage me to write, but instead found a whole new world of information regarding the analog crowd of humans who are collecting, restoring, and researching these fascinating machines. Much like the resurgence of record players and vinyl, typewriters have found their way back onto decorated book shelves, ad campaigns, and into the collections of some very influential people. Most notably, Tom Hanks has a massive collection of vintage typewriters. His stash has roughly 250 separate machines, 90% of which are in working condition. Other typewriter fanatics include singer/songwriter John Mayer and science fiction author Harlan Ellison. What's surprising, especially in a digital age, is that there are still many practical uses for typewriters over computers in some of the most unsuspecting places. For example, in 2015 a New York City councilman introduced a bill to remove typewriters from the NYPD. Apparently, many NYPD officers are still using typewriters to fill out specific forms during the booking process over digital processes even though they have access to computers and digital filing systems. Until a full conversion is complete, many NYPD officers are keeping their typewriters at their stations. Funeral homes are another consumer of typewriter machines as they can use them to fill out death certificates as opposed to trying to print out the information exactly in-line with the original form. These practical uses of typewriter technology keep some aspects of this culture alive, but the real workhorses in the typewriter market are the collectors.

WHO IS STILL BUYING TYPEWRITERS?

Like all avid collector markets, typewriter collectors have several directions to take their casual obsession. A collector can get hooked on a brand, of which there are many to choose from: Royal, Underwood, Smith-Corona, Remington, Olivetti etc. A collector may also find that they like a specific kind of typewriter: portable, electric, manual, old as dirt. Or, if you're like Tom Hanks himself, anything that writes is just as fascinating.



In an interview Hanks did with CBS, he said: "If drums are the backbone of any rock band, then the sound of a typewriter is the sound of productivity." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTtDb73NkNM> This sound can come in many forms depending on the year, the brand, and the type of typewriter you're working with. Caroline, my baby blue Smith Corona from Manchester England, for example has a doorbell-like carriage ding at the end of a line and a thud-like click with each key. Why would sound be important? Well, besides Hanks's reference to the different feels and sounds of his many typewriter selections in his New York Times Articles, these sounds can be utilized for a very specific purpose: a Typewriter Orchestra. Formed in 2004, the Boston Typewriter Orchestra started as a collection of people in the Boston area who were interested in experimental music production through the utilization of typewriter sounds. With a goal only to make enough money to continuing buying typewriters and the occasional pizza, their sound helped them achieve a very niche audience of people interested in percussive performance art. Their group has expanded to include more repertoire, including some covers, and has achieved them enough recognition to complete a small tour of the North Eastern United States. The Boston Typewriter Orchestra has also just released a cassette tape featuring their original songs. This embrace of bygone technology emphasizes the nature of

appreciation that people have for typewriters as tools.

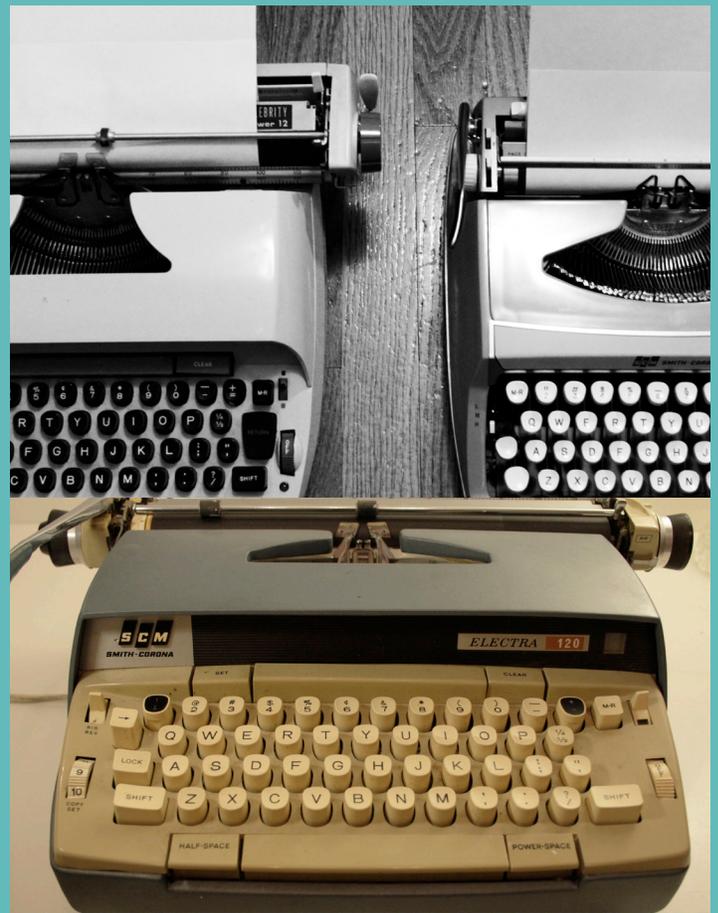
#### WHY THE ANALOG TECH?



In his documentary *California Typewriter* featuring several typewriter collectors, refurbishers, and artists, Tom Hanks equated the process of typing something out on a typewriter as act of measurable productivity that will last much longer than anything written on a computer. A typed thank you note, for example, will be saved forever while a simple email with the same message is so quickly deleted. This sentiment is echoed through John Mayer's explanation of his song writing process as he now types his lyrics on a typewriter so that a measurable process can be observed as he works

through a song. Because it takes more time and thought to type something perfectly on a typewriter, the implication of the words written on that machine seem to have more of an impact on the reader as opposed to a quick tweet or internet only published article. There is a permanence to paper that isn't replicated by continuous hard drive back up processes. Documents get lost all the time in cyberspace, but handwritten or typewritten notes get saved and revisited all the time by the writers who sift through their own creative processes and the people who receive those typewritten notes. Health professionals are even known to suggest typewriters to their patients who are writers who are stuck in a rut with their novels as the change in medium tends to help them get into a new creative mindset. With this in mind, why would a casual person want to indulge in a seemingly expensive habit like buying typewriters? I have never written anything for serious publication, nor have I ever shared my personal prose in a semi-professional setting, but I find that sitting down and forcing myself to type out a page every so often can help clarify thoughts, create manageable lists of tasks, and refresh my creative spirit. If you have a typewriter to type something, you have to have something to say. This pressure is not stressful, but rather like an effective deadline that encourages a creative solution to the problem of having a great medium and platform to create works of writing. Beyond admiring their design quality, their efficacy as a machine that does not require electricity to perform a task, and their myriad of interesting sound effects, typewriters have a stable and reliable quality to them that





is deeply rooted in the fact that they are mechanical. Owner of the California Typewriter Repair shop in Burbank California, Kenneth Alexander, equates the process of working on a typewriter to that of fixing your own bike; It is something that belongs to you, and it is your responsibility to keep it running and know it inside and out. This kind of object permanence that goes beyond software updates or upgrades in operating systems creates a stability and trust between your creative process and the machine. I'm not saying you need one, but I am saying that having a typewriter and learning how to take care of it gives you a whole new appreciation for the craft of writing, and I do think everyone needs a new perspective on this art form.

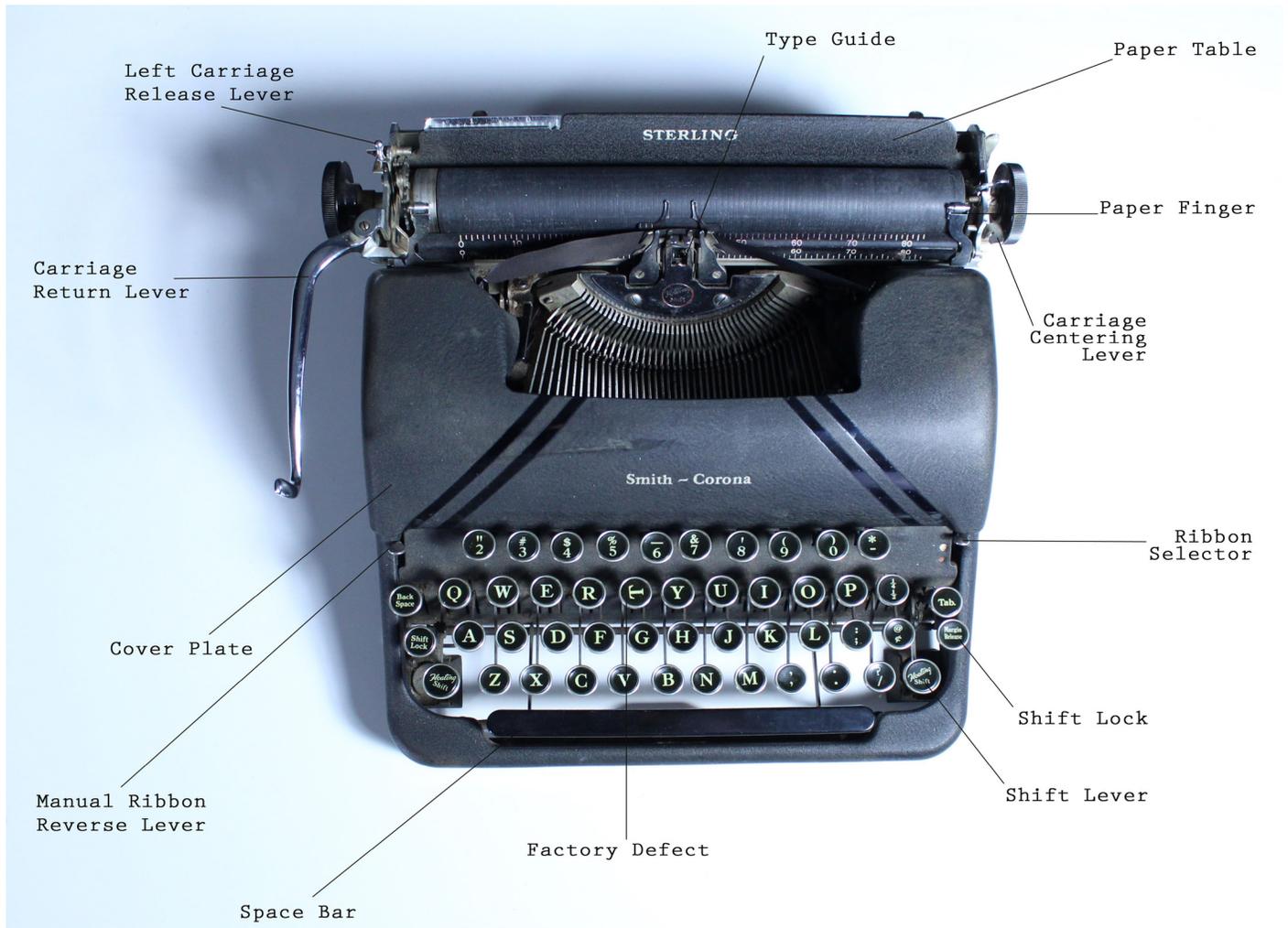
- SARAH EVERETT

# About Us



We love typewriters- plain and simple! Our content is all based on the typewriter community and introducing you to the world of collecting and appreciating these fantastic machines! Follow us on Instagram to learn more about us, and if you post any of our content anywhere, be sure to tag Tom Hanks!

@Just.my.typewriter



Smith-Corona Sterling Portable 1947