

THE OLD COLONEL AND HIS PRINTER

By John F. Hall

This is a life story about my Lexmark printer that malfunctioned one day. After locating the nearest place to have it repaired, my wife, Paula and I traveled to Mayfield, Kentucky. In most of my stories, I weave in other stories to mentor my younger readers, and perhaps, to entertain my other readers. One would think, that after writing stories for the past 45 years, that I should have mastered the art of writing. Sam Leith wrote a book called, "Write to the Point: A Master Class on the Fundamentals of Writing for Any Purpose."



One reviewer of Sam Leith's book wrote: "Good writers follow the rules. Great writers follow the rules-and follow their instincts! Finding the right words, in the order, matters-whether you're a student embarking on an essay, a job application drafting your cover letter, an employee composing an email...even a (hopeful) lover writing a text. Do it wrong and you might get an F, miss the interview, lose a client, or spoil your chance at a second date. Do it right, and the world is yours. In Write to the Point, accomplished writer and literary critic Sam Leith kicks the age-old dos and don'ts to the curb. Yes he covers the nuts and bolts we need to be in complete command of the language: grammar, punctuation, parts of speech, and other subjects half-remembered from grade school. But more importantly, he charts a common sense course between the "Armies of Correctness" - and the "Descriptivist Irregulars." For Leith, knowing not just the rules but also how and when to avoid them-developing an ear for what works best in content-is everything. In this master class, Leith teaches us a skill of paramount importance in this smartphone age, when we all carry a keyboard in our pockets: to write clearly and persuasively for any purpose-to write to the point."

What I like about Sam Leith's book is that he is spot-on that we all carry a smartphone with a keyboard in our pockets. Thanks to Christ's grace and inspiration, I seem to have a talent, to follow my instincts, even if they kick the dos and the don'ts to the curb. I know which rules that I can bend to get "the right flow" in my stories. I will not use Grammarly, a pay for subscription service, to influence the flow of my stories. Grammarly is a digital writing tool that provides grammar and spell checking, plagiarism detection services, and suggestions about clarity, concision, vocabulary, style and tone. I use the free service of OpenOffice and LibreOffice when I draft my stories. They provide free spell check.

Grammarly starts by first offering free spell checks. It enters into OpenOffice and LibreOffice and then provides other free services to "hook" the user. I call it unsolicited intrusion into my writing. I find it interesting that they were not able to provide suggestions in my stories about clarity, concision, vocabulary, style and tone. The three individuals that started the text-checking software maker, Grammarly are worth \$13 billion. About 30 million people use Grammarly each day. The cost for the service is \$12 to \$15 a month. For college students needing to make good grades, it might help. My

purpose in writing stories is to inspire, help, and motivate others. I just give my stories away.

Caelan Adams wrote a poem called, "Writer." It is both current and relevant with the ongoing wars in Ukraine and Israel. These are her words: "I am a writer, I wonder about how the earth was created. I hear people helping other people. I see people fighting for our country. I want the world to be in peace, not in war. I am a writer. I pretend like hate isn't there when it really is. I feel like the best person on earth when I'm around my friends, family, and teacher. I touch people's hearts when they really touch mine. I worry that war will never stop. I cry when I think about Oscar. I am a writer. I say that nothing is impossible. I dream of a world without war and hate. I try to do my best. I hope I can accomplish my dreams. I am a writer."

I show affection and kindness with my stories. Surprisingly, some of my readers, older than me, enjoy receiving my stories. After writing stories for 45 years, one might not think that I am still a work in progress. But writing is a life-long journey, with lessons learned everyday. On Friday, October 20, 2023, I had a doctor's appointment with my rheumatologist, Dr. Cara Hammond in Benton, Kentucky. She has office space, along with Dr. Marty Fulbright, in a building next to the Marshall County Hospital (MCH). The previous day, I called her office to confirm my appointment time. The office was closed for lunch. I received a recording that the office is closed from 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm for lunch. It also stated: "We are sad to announce the passing of Dr. Fulbright." That caught me off-guard."

I had intended to thank Dr. Fulbright, my orthopedic surgeon, for the excellent letter that he wrote for me. I used it to increase my disability percentage from the Veterans Administration (VA). He wrote that the injury to my right foot was service connected, as a result of parachuting out of helicopters and planes, and running in jump boots, for more than 30 years. The VA agreed and increased my disability by 20 percent. Dr. Fulbright was 55 years old. For reasons that we may never know, he took his own life. He was such a kind, gentle soul. Dr. Hammond signed an order for blood work, so I went next door to the hospital lab to have it drawn.

Paula and I drove to the Howard D. Company in Mayfield. My Lexmark laser printer had malfunctioned and needed to be repaired. I parked outside and walked inside and asked for assistance. One of the repair technicians came outside, and removed the printer from the trunk of my car. Once inside the repair company, three other technicians gathered around my printer. I showed the technicians a printout of my last story. The ink was down the entire side of the page. One of the technicians said: "I believe I know what is wrong with the printer." I told them to let me know if the printer could be fixed. I gave the repair company a check for \$74 to examine the printer. One of the technicians said he would call me to tell me what it would cost to repair the printer.

Paula and I drove downtown. We had to detour around several city blocks that were demolished. On December 10, 2021, an EF-4 tornado, with 190-mile an hour winds, hit. Entire city blocks were turned to rubble. Sixty businesses were left in shambles. One of

the hardest-hit businesses was the Mayfield Consumer Products candle factory, one of the town's larger employers.

More than 100 people were working during the night of the tornado, which caused the factory building to collapse. Eight factory workers were killed. I noticed a track hoe digging out a business basement. What caught my attention was a tall, former hotel. It was made into an office building. All of the windows were blown out. It looked like a war zone, almost two years after the twister hit the town of 10,000 people. Back in 1977, I was on a temporary law enforcement assignment, and I lived in Fancy Farm, an unincorporated town that is located ten miles from Mayfield, for a year. I traveled, every week through Mayfield, on my way back to Trigg County.

The Howard D. Happy Company called me to tell me the cost to repair my printer. I told them to go ahead and repair it. I received another call, on Saturday, that the printer was repaired. I told them that I would pick it up on Monday, as I had a doctor's appointment in Paducah. Paula and I drove to Mayfield to pick up the printer. As I was waiting to have my payment processed, I talked to the receptionist about the tornado. She told me that they have not gotten the traffic lights working downtown, and the Court House has not been repaired. She sounded frustrated. A technician loaded the printer in the trunk of my car. From Mayfield, we drove to Benton to pick up my lab results from the MCH. We then drove to Paducah for my appointment with Dr. Sensarma, my pulmonologist. He showed me the scar tissue in my lungs. He said he wanted a CT scan in six months, to see if the damaged had gotten worse. His office did not administer the RSV vaccine, and he told me to get it. I stopped in Murray, on my way home, and was administered the RSV vaccine at Walmart. The CDC announced that there is a triple threat this year from COVID, the flu, and RSV.

My son, John helped me take the printer up the stairs to the second floor of my old house. My Lexmark laser printer uses a non-impact photocopier technology. When a document is sent to the printer, a laser beam "draws" the document on a selenium-coated drum using electrical charges. The drum is then rolled in toner, a dry powder type of ink that adheres to the charged image on the drum. The toner is transferred onto a piece of paper and fused to the paper with heat and pressure. The printed paper is then released from the printer. The electrical charge is removed from the drum, and the excess toner is collected and used again. What happened to my printer is that fuser unit malfunctioned, and had to be replaced.

On October 25, 2023, Paula and I traveled to Nashville, Tennessee for my appointment with my dermatologist, Dr. Natalie Curcio. She told me that it was five years ago, that she removed the cancer on my forehead, going down to my skull. Her skills saved my life. If the cancer had penetrated into my brain, I may not have survived. I have been fighting skin cancer for the past 33 years. From Nashville, we drove to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. We had to show our military identification cards. The Military Police soldier at Gate 4, gave me a hand salute and said: "Welcome to Fort Campbell, Colonel." I saluted him back and drove on to the Town Center Pharmacy.

I was using my Dell back-up laser printer, and I decided to switch to the Lexmark laser printer. But the red warning light came on.

I called the Howard D. Happy Company and talked to a technician. He felt the problem was in my laptop sending the wrong message to the printer. I got on my smartphone and put in the question of how to change the paper type. I suspected, that when the technician was replacing the fuser unit, he changed the type of paper from plain to 6D. The problem was in the printer settings. The technician was using a higher grade of laser paper, than the low cost paper that I use. Once I changed the printer setting, my Lexmark laser accepted the plain paper and is back on-line. Adults my age, by society's opinions, are usually not productive. I try to do my part, and give something back, in the form of my stories.

My fellow usher, at the small church that I attend, is Thomas Fritsch. He is three weeks older than me. With Thomas in mind, I'll end this story with a poem written by Francis Duggan called, "Time's Not On Your Side." I'm nearly one year and a half away from turning 80. And only Jesus Christ knows when He will call me home. These are Francis Duggan's words: "Have you ever felt that time is not on your side? And from the Reaper of lives there is nowhere to hide. Your worth of humanity you often does doubt. And you often ask yourself what life is all about. Your better years long in the forever gone. But the desire it is in you for to keep on living. You will fight for life until your last living breath. You will not be one to surrender to death. It has been many years since you were in your life's prime. And you realize that you are running out of time. Each dawning one day nearer to your last night and day. The passing of time has left you balding and gray. In your eight decades of time quite a span. And you will live on for as long as you can."

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*Read other stories by John F. Hall at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>