

Pencils

23 March, 2020

I love pencils. Actually, any writing implement, including this computer. But pencils hold a particular place in my heart.

WAIT! Don't click away, mumbling about my choice of today's topic. I'll try to make the reading worth your while and anyway, I never promised my missives would be uniformly profound. Please, just bear with me.

I've never been much of a calligrapher. I was always the kid whose Ts and Fs were easily confused, not to mention capital Gs and Qs. I just never got the hang of making all those precise and lovely loops and humps and to this day, my signature is a puzzle. I did manage some decent block printing during my serious note-taking days in the Navy and college but no more. These days, essential tremor makes reading even my non-cursive hand an adventure in code-breaking.

So, you might reasonably assume that my high regard for pencils is related to the ability to erase and rework any errant scribbles. Not so. I hardly ever use up the eraser before the pencil is reduced to a nub. I'm more of a cover-the-offending-passage-in-scribbles kind of guy. Much to the dismay of a succession of nuns during my formative years.

So, why pencils?

We'll, as a woodworker, I use pencils to label and orient parts, mark waste and darken scribe lines. And of course, to check off items on my cut list as they are completed.

But aside from their use as marking tools, pencils appeal to me because of their very nature. They don't smear, assuming I use decent # 2s. And sharpening is a cinch – I have a sharpener in my office, one by my fave chair in front of the TV and still another in my workshop. And in a pinch, I can use the razor knife that rides in one of my apron pockets. Pens, on the other hand, smear. Actually, on whichever hand is holding them. Once they start smearing, they're done – there's no pen analog to sharpening a pencil. And I've never had a pencil ruin a shirt pocket.

Pencils accommodate my physical disabilities. In addition to tremors, I have serious arthritis in my hands, thanks to my early years playing drums fairly well but totally incorrectly as to hand position. And I tend to be a 'hard presser' when using any writing implement. Pens allow me to bear down without noticing I'm doing so until my hand aches. And once the ache sets in, it's there for the night. But a pencil lead will break long before I cause serious trauma to my hand, reminding me to press more lightly.

Yes, I occasionally sharpen a new pencil only to find the lead is off center but that doesn't happen more often than picking up a dry pen, so that's a dead heat in the pen / pencil competition.

I like pencils. For all the reasons expressed here and for one more - they don't get swiped as often as do pens.

So, there's that.