

The Typewriter
by
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This story, about a young man named Peter, begins in the late 1920s. The theme is simple: Too often, since we don't know what's best of us, we ask for the wrong thing. Then, when we find we've been given something else, we're disappointed. But, later, sometimes much later, we discover that what we received was exactly what we needed.

The story opens in the newspaper office where Peter's father worked as a reporter.

Peter tells his story...

The newspaper office was a beehive of activity. As the deadline approached, reporters hunched over their typewriters staring at the page before them pounding out the stories that people would be reading at breakfast. It was very exciting.

On one of my visits to the newspaper, I made a discovery: I could distinguish the sound of Dad's typing from that of the other reporters. Though there were dozens of reporters all working side by side, when I closed my eyes, I could hear Dad's typing. The clacking of the keys and the zing of the carriage return had a rhythm that was distinctly his.

After a few visits, *I wanted a typewriter.* I began a campaign to convince Dad to give me one for Christmas. After months of dropping hints, I took a new tact. I added, "I want to be a writer; I need a typewriter." The "I want to be a writer" caught his attention. I wasn't so sure about the typewriter. Sometime in November, I overheard Mom and Dad talking about Christmas, and I heard the word typewriter. There was hope.

The box was about the right size, but much too light. I was certain that it *did not contain a typewriter.* It was hard to hide my disappointment.

The package contained a large number of composition books. There was also a box of pencils, and a small, old, folding knife in lieu of a sharpener. After I had unwrapped all of the little items in the big box, Dad gave me another. It contained a Bible.

Dad could see my disappointment and began to explain why he had not given me what I wanted. "We know you wanted a typewriter, but your mother and I have talked it over and decided that for now, this is better.

Dad continued, "Peter, the first task of a writer is to decide which stories are worth telling." At this point, he picked up the Bible. "To do that, you're going to need a reference; this is the best one I know. The next task is to do as Hemingway suggested, "...write one true sentence..." Writing by hand will slow you down and help you write that one sentence which contains the essence of what you're saying. *Peter, it's more important for you to learn how to think, than type.*"

I wanted to complain, but knew better. The man who was speaking was not just my father. He was a writer and had been for most of his life. As Dad reached under the tree for another package, Mom held his arm and said, "Peter, there's one more thing," she looked at Dad, then back at me, and continued, "In time, you will get a typewriter, but there will be occasions when you can't use it. When that happens, your ability to work with these simple tools could be very important." As she spoke, Dad smiled at her.

After college, I took a job as a cub reporter. The next year the war broke out and I became a correspondent. It was uncanny; I was following the same path as Dad. In December of 1944, I was in Belgium working out of a place named Bastogne. The Allied armies were advancing on all fronts; the war itself was finally dying.

On the 16th, a lieutenant burst into our makeshift office and announced that the Germans had launched a major offensive. He said the 101st Airborne was going to hold right here at Bastogne and we had to quickly decide whether to leave, or stay.

I asked the lieutenant what he was going to do. He pointed his rifle toward the sound of artillery that was coming from the edge of town and said, "Peter, I'm taking a platoon that way." I hesitated for a moment and said, "Take me with you." He looked at me and asked, "Why?" I answered, "This is going to be a story worth telling." He nodded and said, "Get your gear."

When I met the platoon, my pack was slung over one shoulder and my typewriter was tucked under my other arm. "Peter" said the Lieutenant, "What's that?" "It's my typewriter." I replied indignantly. He held out his rifle and said, "If you want to carry one of these, fine, but that thing's going to get you killed." We talked a bit and he convinced me to leave it.

The battle developed quickly, and in a few days, Bastogne and 101st Airborne were surrounded by the German Army. We didn't yet know it, but this was the Battle of the Bulge. For twelve days, we were constantly under fire, running from one fox hole to another. The

lieutenant had been right about the typewriter; it would have gotten me killed.

On the 25th, it was cold and snowing. Shell fire was sporadic, but ongoing. Through the smoke and snow, I could see someone running from foxhole to foxhole. It was the lieutenant. When he reached me, he was out of breath, but smiling. I asked, "What are you doing---you're the one who's going to get killed."

He laughed as he patted the top of my helmet and said, "Just keeping an eye on my men." We talked for a minute while he waited for a lull in the shelling. Finally, there was a pause, and as he climbed out of the hole, he said, "Peter, Merry Christmas."

As I sat alone in my fox hole I realized that I had been right. This was a story worth telling. I was witnessing a heroic display of courage and tenacity by a group of badly outnumbered Americans. As I considered how to tell their story, I sharpened the stub of my pencil with a small, old, folding knife; a mud smeared composition book lay on my lap.

As I looked at these simple tools, I finally saw with clarity what had happened on that Christmas day so many years before. *My father had wisely given me what I needed, instead of what I wanted.*

And so it is with gifts that come from God as well. Most often He gives us what we need, not necessarily what we want. Though at the time we are often disappointed, in the end we are better off, and sometimes, His choice even saves our life.

Amen