

Positively Speaking

By Mark Wilson

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Waft Thy Substance

It was my college paper, and I stayed up all night attempting to capture the essence of William Shakespeare. I wrote, re-wrote, and wrote again. The CFD (Cruddy First Draft) didn't cut it. Neither did the CSD (Cruddy Second Draft) nor the CTD (Cruddy Third Draft.)

I worked my fingers to the bone hammering stubborn typewriter keys, in a frantic attempt to sound intelligent and scholarly. I scoured the thesaurus for the longest multi-syllable words I could find and plopped them into my sentences.

Finally, after several anguished hours, I had a six page masterpiece. Never, in all my life, had I written (or even read) a collection of so many scholarly words in such confined space.

I smiled triumphantly as I turned my assignment in to Dr. Elder the next morning. As a noted scholar in literature, she was sure to be impressed!

A few days later, our graded assignments came back. I was astonished to find no grade on my paper. Instead, a bold "See Me!" was scribbled at the top of the page.

Nervously, I approached Dr. Elder after class, clutching my composition.

"I-I-I'm wondering why you wrote this on the top of my paper" I stammered.

The good professor smiled, and with a twinkle in her eye, replied, "Mark, I know you can do much better than this. You need to BE YOURSELF when you write, and quit trying to be somebody you're not! Those aren't your words. That's not your heart. You should write to express rather than impress.

"You have the potential to be a delightful and creative writer -- but I need to hear it in YOUR voice -- in YOUR style!"

"Now, I'm going to give you another chance. Instead of trying to be a Shakespearian scholar, just relax and be you! Say it the way you feel it!"

So, properly chastened and motivated, I returned to the typewriter in my dormitory, and returned with a new paper -- as well as a new outlook on writing, which has stayed with me ever since:

Loosen up.

Have fun.

Write what you mean from the heart!

Say it your way, and let 'er fly.

Or, I could put it another way, reverting to Shakespearian: "In tranquilized repose and festive merriment, inscribe the quintessence of thy bosom and waft thy substance."

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