

DELORES COPELAND

THE LOWLY FORGOTTEN PENCIL

As a child, I never wrote on walls and I have no recollection of learning how to print or write. It was so long ago, we probably used quill pens.

My dad once made a real quill pen out of a large, grey pigeon feather. With a razor blade, he cut the hollow tip into a v-shape and then put a vertical slit up into the middle. And do you know what? It worked beautifully. I was really impressed. In those days, we even had ink bottles in our homes. But my pencil digresses . . .

I am not a writer, I am a talker. Before I write my assignment these sentences come running randomly through my brain for days, after which, they get scribbled down on paper. Now the hard part for my pencil is to start putting those sentences in some cohesive and, hopefully interesting, order. Pens write too fast and too smoothly. The words run away from me. But I do love pencils, because I love trees . . . and wood is a living, breathing entity. My real hardwood floor slats are always contracting and expanding because of the weather. It's as if they are breathing.

There is intimacy with my pencil as I tap it to my pursed lips while deep in thought. You could do that with a pen I suppose but it's just not the same. Remember all those teeth marks we'd find on a used pencil? Only one particular person's teeth will match those marks. And what about the deep indentations left in the flesh of a soft chosen finger? Or, that calloused bump that develops on your finger after years and years of pressing too hard. It's all very personal.

When you are typing on a keyboard, you don't even need to look at your hands, as the letters quickly and magically get slapped onto the paper. But when you are writing with a pencil, you watch your fingers move it along as the graphite smoothly attaches one letter to the next, forming words, then whole sentences. We do, of course, have the problem of illegible handwriting. But that's for another story – written in pencil. And, of course, finally . . . you can't put a keyboard behind your ear.

This story was originally written in pencil. 