

My life as a butterfly

I'd always known that someday I'd be a writer. For years I spent hundreds of hours pecking away at the trusty Coronamatic portable electric typewriter that got me through grad school. I wrote pitiful short stories and eventually workshop handouts, using pasted in graphics and lines of



characters for decoration to prepare them for the copy shop. That electric typewriter with its carbon ribbon made them look like they came from a big office. I was so relieved to have that electronic convenience rather than the stiffer Hermes portable with its chronically faded ribbon that I'd used in high school and college.

One day in early 1982 I saw a funny-looking typewriter with a tiny TV on top at the school district administration office. I instantly recognized it as one of the word processors I'd heard about. *Now that is what I really need. If I didn't have to keep retyping everything sixteen times. . . I could really fly if I had one of those!* I thought. But word processors cost over \$3000 in 1980 dollars. Not in my wildest dreams could I imagine spending that much money on a typewriter. Not with three children to put through college! Life went on, and I kept pecking away at my writing on that typewriter.

On Halloween, 1982, I had no idea that the world as I knew it was about to change. It began as any other day, but then Hubby took Elder Son trick-or-treating and they came home with an apple in their bag. An Apple][+ that is. An Apple Computer with sixty-four kilobytes of memory, two floppy disk drives, and

a twelve-inch green-on-black monitor. Hubby and sons spent the weekend setting everything up and checking it all out.

"By the way, you'll probably want to try out the word processing program," Hubby mentioned casually sometime over the weekend. I caught my breath as I realized what this meant — that magic machine had come to our house, in a slightly different form. I burned off some of the adrenalin surge doing some extra cleaning, biding my time, waiting my turn. Even if I could have coaxed the guys away for a few minutes, I preferred for my initiation to be private. I watched and asked enough questions to gather the basics: insert disk, flip switch, wait for the grinding to stop. Insert another disk, do the same.

Monday finally arrived. I took my time making coffee after everyone was gone. Savoring each moment, I sat down, flipped the switch, loaded the disk operating system, inserted the AppleWriter disk, and the rest is history. Within a few minutes I'd realized that everything I'd dreamed and way more was now possible. I could edit, adapt, save, reprint, and (gasp of joy) ADD GRAPHICS! That graphics feature took a few more weeks to realize, but I never doubted it would happen.

I felt as light and liberated as the Tiger Swallowtails that cluster around the milkweed in the backyard. From that moment on, I never doubted that I would write and write and write and that eventually the world would read my words. The words took wings, just as I felt I had. I wrote. I learned. I became Ritergal. After more than thirty years, millions of words, tens of thousands of pages, dozens of published articles, hundreds of blog posts and six books later, with killer computers at my fingertips and the World Wide Web as my audience, that dream has come true and it lives on. My words and thoughts do flutter around the world with the grace of a butterfly. Now I'm laying eggs, waiting for the next batch of butterflies to hatch.