

SANIBEL SHELL SHOCKED

Man's Best Friend – His Pencil

By Art Stevens

The pencil companies really hate me. I'm not their typical customer. I bought a box of standard size pencils about four years ago. Each pencil is about ten inches long and there were a dozen in the pack I bought.

It is now four years later and I'm still using the very first pencil I pulled out of the pack. It's a little long in the tooth, admittedly, but it's still a warrior of a pencil.

Its rubber eraser is mostly gone, just like the hair on most of our scalps, and its length has diminished to about four inches. But its point is just as sharp as ever. When you think about it what else could you ask for in a pencil except to have a sharp point? And if the point gets a bit dull and the writing comes out a bit fuzzy as a result all you have to do is get out the hand held battery-less pencil sharpener and grind that point down to the sharp writing instrument it was created to be.

But what about those other eleven pencils that have just been sitting on the shelf gathering dust? Certainly their pride is hurt that they haven't found their way into my good right hand – or any one else's for that matter.

They're all perfectly good pencils that were created to be fine writing instruments that also allowed you to erase and redo as you went along.

Based on my own experience I have to assume that most people don't use pencils much anymore. They use modern ball point pens and, of course, computers.

Most of my own writing comes from my desk top which gives me the opportunity to edit as I go along. Which leads me to think about why I use my trusty four-inch balding pencil at all? After all, in human terms, my pencil is more than seventy years old, just like a dog which ages seven years to our one.

But unlike dogs, my pencil is immortal. I can use it at the same pace for the next twenty years and at most it will shrink to about an inch. With just the right grip it can still remain a potent writing tool.

So what do I use my trusty, loyal pencil for when I have so many modern alternatives? I use it to record items that may need to be changed, altered or modified – like entries on my desk calendar. Why make an entry for a dinner date, the doctor or the massage therapist with a pen when it may need to be changed at the last moment?

After all, the doctor's office may call to say that he needs to be in front of a grand jury to fight medical malpractice charges and that my appointment needs to be changed. If you entered the appointment in pen then you'd simply have to cross it out by pen and enter the new appointment. How messy.

On the other hand, if you entered it by pencil then you could erase it with the balding but still usable eraser until nothing at all is visible any longer to the naked eye – and enter the new appointment with the doctor for another day, assuming the doctor hasn't been indicted by the new date and is no longer permitted to practice medicine.

If that were the case then the problem is no longer the pencil's.

I may be old fashioned, I admit, but I've forged a beautiful relationship with my now midget pencil. The pencil and I are going to continue working together for years to come – as long as I can prevent it from shrinking into oblivion. I would hate to have to break in a new ten-incher whose loyalty and trustworthiness is a total unknown.