

I was always pretty small when I was growing up, and looked like a poster child for poor nutrition. I also grew up pretty uncoordinated, and had what was referred to as ‘the Lowry klutz’. It was very obvious to all that I was not destined for a sports career. For example, I could not stay on my feet as I tried to catch a baseball, but would slide on my knees for more stability. This complete and continual state of imbalance kept me wondering about myself as I was growing up. I needed to feel special in a world of sports and beauty, and I had difficulty trying to “find myself”.

I weighed only about 90 pounds in the ninth grade, and knew that I was never going to be a “babe magnet”. There wasn’t much that I could do about it, either. After being ignored by a particular girl that I was interested in, and for all of the other reasons building up within me, I decided to change something that I could.

There was something about being able to write left-handed that fascinated me, even though I couldn’t write all that well with my right hand (I remember getting an “Unsatisfactory” in handwriting in grammar school). Not many people wrote left-handed when I grew up – indeed many natural southpaws were forced to write with their other hand because that was the only way to “teach” them. Unfortunately, this is symptomatic of the greatest problem in our educational system in the past (and perhaps even now to some extent): the inability (or disinclination) to deviate from standard methods to teach special needs. But I digress. Being able to write left-handed would put me into a more “special” category, and would be a little like the road less travelled.

I wondered if there was a true overpowering “handedness” to people, or if anyone could learn to write with either hand. Shouldn’t people actually start out with a certain symmetry and balance? It seemed to me that there might be a slight leaning, but once you chose a hand and practiced with it every day of your life, your other hand would naturally feel pretty useless. Anyway, I began to practice writing until I got to the point that it was almost legible. Then I began using my new skill at school. One of my early achievements that was good enough to pass the visual test was to draw a credible map for a social studies project. Of course a little lack of control contributed nicely to the jagged coastlines that I had to create.

The more I worked at this, even with the blisters and callouses, I felt a curious strength when letting the other side of my brain be in charge. I had read where the use of this side might enable me to be more creative and artistic. I’m not sure that this came true, but I was at least striving for more of a balanced nature inside. There is a special beauty in the symmetry of the human body, and as the comedian Gallagher once said in one of his routines, referring to his inability to throw with his non-dominant arm, “If you got your body at Sears, you’d take it back!” It’s almost as if the left hand did not know what the right hand is doing.

Leonardo da Vinci was a powerful character from history: he was a Renaissance Man, a great artist, and a great thinker who was ambidextrous (He painted with either hand) and who inspired me in this quest. I’ve always thought that the quote “I’d give my right arm to be ambidextrous”, was really funny. Sometimes we are just as contradictory in our efforts to be a complete person. I don’t know how many other people feel the way I did, and I have met none who I thought were regular ambidextrous writers. Of course, within the sports of baseball and basketball, the use of both hands is wide-spread. But I doubt that they write with either hand in their journals.

One of my favorite movies is “The Princess Bride”, and one of my favorite scenes in it is where the hero and the man who is looking to revenge his father’s death are involved in a swordfight. They spar magnificently until Montoya exclaims that he is not really left-handed, and switches his sword to his right. At this point, the hero claims that he is not left-handed either, and also switches. And they continue their match using their opposite hand. I don’t know of any other such ambidextrous moment in movie history.

You might ask how I choose which hand to write with each day. It depends a bit on how I feel and how the spirit moves me. It may depend on the troublesome spine of a notebook (that is sometimes hard for a left-handed person), or if I feel the need for more intense concentration (needed to guide the left hand). I used to not write my official signature until I began making my regular signature more illegible and more of a pattern than a series of letters.

I try not to make an obvious switch in front of people, but I do enjoy it when people are sharp enough to notice. I don't try to make a big deal out of it. If someone comments that I am left-handed, I let it go. If the conversation continues, I will admit to being naturally right-handed.

The sense of power involved here is connected to a spiritual source, and it began to burrow further down within me. I visualized that flow of power and eventually wrote a story about a swordsman who had to switch hands in the middle of a fight with an enemy. The ultimate ambidexterity, though, was a result of the miraculous power of God rather than an innate superiority in coordination.

Writing the story was, in a way, a critical point in my life, in my journey of self-discovery. It expressed a basic concept that I felt very deeply, and was a launch point for a series of stories with related themes. The transfiguration that can occur in each one of us through the power of God can lead us to greater heights. He can infuse us with power and control beyond our human understanding. For me, ambidexterity is a symbol of the power that we have available to change our lives.

© Copyright 2008, Heard Lowry