

## Hand-Picked Predecessor

IT'S A WEDNESDAY, 10:43 A.M. MT, AS I BEGIN THIS, and I'm looking out my office window watching time go by. Figuratively speaking, of course. I'm actually looking at the keyboard as I type this and then up at the screen to admire my work, and, well, I had to look at the clock. Only occasionally do I get a chance to glance out the window. But the important thing is that time is still going by. Can't stop it. And there always seems to be pressure to put it to good use.

Looking out the window and watching it go by is not generally considered to be a "good use" of time.

As I enter paragraph three, it's no longer 10:43 a.m. It's still Wednesday, though; I'm not that slow. And picture this: On my screen, to the left of the blinking cursor, are the words I just wrote (and you just read) and following the blinking cursor, on the right, are the words I'm about to write. You haven't read them yet, but you can see they're there.

Ah, if only I could see them as well as you can. The rest of *my* page is blank. It's when I get to the blank part that I tend stare out the window and watch time go by. But don't you do that. Keep reading. There are words on your page.

### The Blank Part Starts Here

Suddenly it hits me as I look back from the window and try to figure out how to count the number of times my cursor blinks in one minute. By the way, that's something you can't do easily by yourself. Every time I look up at the clock to see if a minute has gone by yet, I lose count and have to start over again.

A word of advice: It's not a good idea to ask someone to help counting cursor blinks. I mean, you could ask that person to count while you keep time or you can count while your partner keeps time. But, either way it's not a good career move, or good for any other kind of relationship you might be in, either. Nope, it's much better to just stare out the window and try to figure out a way to do it all by yourself.

Here's what it's all about. That cursor is saying: "Move me, move me, move me." It's impatient being in the present. To the left of the blinking cursor is the past, to the right is the future, and smack in the middle is the blinking present. Why does the cursor want to move toward the future? Because it's afraid of the past! It wants to get

as far away from the past as possible. It needs my help. I also, occasionally, can hear it saying: "Help me, help me, help me." The cursor has a very simple message. It's not very articulate. All it's got is one-syllable, two-word sentences.

It's strange, though. Why would the cursor (or anyone else, for that matter) fear the past? What do you fear most, past or future?

Well, "fear of the unknown" is certainly a vote for the future. You might think that writers (and we're all writers at some point in our lives) have got to fear the future—the blank white future to the right of the blinking cursor. Not the cursor, though, and not me either. There's something a lot more worrisome than the future. I could put anything I want in the future. That blank white page is full of opportunity. Just glance ahead a bit. The page isn't blank. I worked it out.

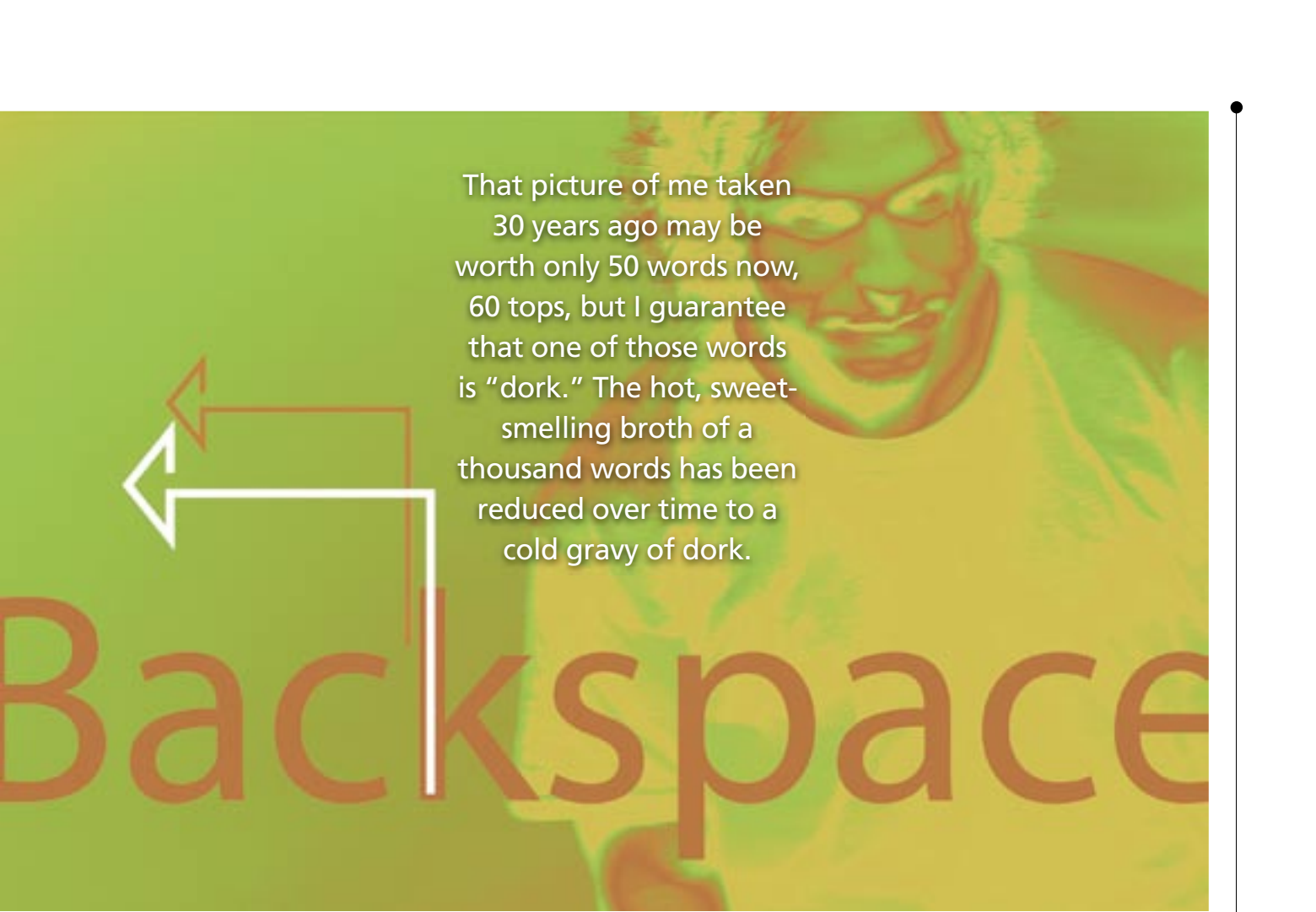
No, it's the past that must be feared, and the cursor knows that! The *true* past is the great unchangeable. Once it's done, it's history. It's all that stuff in the closet. It could be good, but let's face it; it hardly ever is. Do this little experiment: Go look at yourself in a mirror. A full-length mirror would be best because there's a lot more data there than in just a head shot. Give yourself a pretty good look, and then ask yourself this: What could you change about your appearance *today* so that in 30 years you won't look silly?

### The Past Becomes Future

It's more than just a rhetorical question. Yeah, you look great now, you think—the haircut, the makeup, the pants, the glasses—but you can come out from behind that mirror and someone could take a picture of you. In fact, if someone tells you he's going to take a picture of you and there's a mirror handy, or even a highly polished spoon, you'll go there first just to check yourself out. What are you looking for? Well, you're probably not asking yourself "the question" as you should. Your wrongly placed concern is only about the way you look *now*, not how you'll look in 30 years.

Here's the deal. You can change the way you look *now*. But a picture! A picture captures the past. You can't change that. Talk about loss of control. Talk about a reason to be afraid. You see, a picture may be worth a thousand words

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30 years ago may be  
worth only 50 words now,  
60 tops, but I guarantee  
that one of those words  
is “dork.” The hot, sweet-  
smelling broth of a  
thousand words has been  
reduced over time to a  
cold gravy of dork.

# Backspace

when brand new, but pictures depreciate in word value as time goes by. That picture of me taken 30 years ago may be worth only 50 words now, 60 tops, but I guarantee that one of those words is “dork.” The hot, sweet-smelling broth of a thousand words has been reduced over time to a cold gravy of dork.

The sideburns. The thick, black-framed glasses like the kind Bob Dylan wore on his *Unplugged* album. Remember the really wide ties? It couldn't have been healthy to be that thin! And where's the wisdom? See, that's what you've got to be afraid of—the past coming back to haunt you. If you're not careful, it'll happen again ... and again ... and again, every time someone takes a picture of you.

Despite what you might have thought, styles don't recycle, at least not in a human lifetime. You're never going to be able to look back at an old picture and see a modern person unless you ask yourself *right now* what you can change so you won't look silly in 30 years. The bottom line is that it's much better to look silly

*now*, in the fleeting present, than to look silly *forever* in the immutable past. Some people already know that.

And that brings us to this interesting thought and the promise in the title of this piece. Not too long ago I heard the morning sportscaster on the Denver NBC affiliate announce that an assistant coach of a basketball team was being given the chance to be the “hand-picked predecessor” of the current coach. Wow, I thought, how is he going to do that? Well, of course, what the sportscaster should have said was hand-picked “successor.” Somebody's blooper reel just got bigger. If a picture can make you look silly, a moving picture can make you look even sillier. I thought, too bad for her but then, why not? Why can't we use technology to make the past just as malleable as the future?

Think about a growing common complaint that in this electronic age, pictures can no longer be trusted to reflect reality. That can be advantageous to a fearer of the past. We don't have to worry about looking

silly in 30 years. Just deny it's you in the picture, or at least not really you. Tell everyone that someone is just having a good goof. You never owned, and why would you even wear, a silly-looking hat like that. Or, better yet, convert all your old pictures into electronic format and edit them. You can be whoever you wanted to be. You can hand-pick your own predecessor!

And while you're at it, you can rewrite history too because—do you know what I just realized? There's a backspace key on this computer that can delete what I just wrote. All this time I thought the cursor was saying, “Move me,” and “Help me,” when all along it's been screaming: “Backspace, backspace, backspace!” I didn't get, it but now I do, and I just made one cursor pretty darn happy. The persistent little thing just said, “Thank you,” three times.

Just think of it. In this electronic digital age we're all of us finally liberated from our past. Or at least we will be when the paper trail has been overgrown.

Can't wait to see my résumé. ●