How I learned to type

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Tomorrow is the 150th anniversary of the granting of United States patent 79,265 to Christopher Latham Sholes for a type-writing machine.

My daughter asked me how I learned to type. I told her that I learned on a typewriter. This led to a lot of follow-up questions, starting with "What's a typewriter?"

It was an Adler Junior typewriter, though I don't know exactly which model. It was the portable version that came in a carrying case, and it looked a lot like this, except that instead of arrows, the caps-lock key was labelled "LOCK", and the backspace key was labeled "BACK SPACE".

Thanks to the Internet, I found a manual for a related model, whereupon I finally learned what the two levers on the left and right hand sides of the keyboard were for. The left hand one selects the ribbon, if you were fancy enough to have a multi-color ribbon. Setting it on white means that you typed with no ribbon at all, useful if making a stencil for a mimeograph. The right hand lever let you set and clear tabs.

I learned to type by borrowing a typing book from the local library and working through the exercises.

Some years later, my dad bought an electric typewriter, but I much preferred the old manual typewriter. The electric typewriter motor was really loud (even when not typing), and the carriage was so heavy that when you hit the carriage return key, the entire typewriter shook when the carriage banged into the stop. On the other hand, it had a correction ribbon, which was nice.

Exercise: Why does the backspace key have an arrow pointing *forward*?

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