

If we knew then what we know now

As I sit here typing at a "QWERTY" keyboard, I realize once again the power of inertia. We repeat what we've done before, even while wishing it were different. It's not just habit. If I were to try typing on a keyboard with a different configuration, I would be awkward, not only on the new board, but I would mess up my typing skills, such as they are, on the standard keyboard.

As you may be aware, the standard keyboard was designed, not to speed typists, but to slow them down. The typewriter of 1900 was primitive and slow, but the human beings of that day were as capable of fast fingerwork as we are. They had to be slowed to match the primitive machine. QWERTY was the result. For efficiency we should all be using something like a so-called "Dvorak" keyboard. In the several decades I've been typing, I might have keyboarded several million more words.

As it is, when I learned to type, back in the forties, we were told to go for speed. Accuracy? Later. I'm still waiting for accuracy. The third millenium is almost here.

In San Francisco one of the strongest arguments in favor of keeping Army Street and Fillmore Street, as contrasted to Cesar Chavez Boulevard and Goodlett Avenue is the drag created by thousands of pages of letterhead, boxes of envelopes, all those street signs, etc. No one wants to go to the trouble and expense of changing. Inertia again.

In Pacifica I suggested, perhaps 20 years ago, the stores in Linda Mar Shopping Center drop the "one" from their numbers. Linda Mar Blvd. runs from 500 to 1699. The shopping center is numbered from 1230 to 1450. Every single day someone is annoyed, confused, and put to unnecessary expense by the duplication between shopping center and Blvd. addresses. Postmen, UPS drivers and hundreds of truckers have wasted time and energy. Ordinary citizens likewise. By dropping the 1, this problem could be eliminated, but it would be too much trouble, for the first three months. Like a person with a toothache who avoids the dentist, the folks who could deal with it, won't.

As it is, like an irregular verb in English, it will continue to be a nuisance to quite a few people every day, every week, every month, and every year from now on. Though dropping the "one" would be simple, it will not be done. My friend Bud Meyers, who has been touting the metric system for years, will understand. Little children in Pacifica schools, and in thousands of other American schools are being taught, with great waste of time and effort, that 12 inches makes a foot, three feet a yard, 5280 feet a mile, and so on. At

least, the dollar is decimalized. In France the children learn the decimalized metric system much more easily than our children learn the confusing 16 ounces make a pound, three feet make a yard, four quarts make a gallon measuring system. Even so, we've all invested so much in lousy systems, whether street numbers, measuring systems, or typewriter keyboards, we're reluctant to give them up.