

Reading — The Lost Art

“A” rt” often conjures up images of fine arts, paintings, sculpture, music, the stage, dance and for some, pottery, jewelry, poetry and writing.

You might not think that reading would fit into this category. But really, art is the creation of beautiful things, and since beautiful is a relative term, art can be just about anything, even if it is created in the mind.

Like an artist, a reader requires a special talent. An artist requires a skill, an ability to create, a technique to craft a thought-provoking piece of work. Whereas, a reader must desire to create time, expand awareness and take it all in.

Writing as an art, is ideally an open-ended medium of expression. Reading is precisely the connection to that expression. With a book, you can go anywhere and learn just about anything, usually

for less than \$20.

Reading is intended as a lasting form of communication, a lingering personal interaction. In other words, when you read, you get a clearer picture of things, and the joy and escape we experience lasts longer. Yet we are reading less — WHY?

As an art form, reading requires motivation — a reason to actually take the time. But we have become an “I want it, and I want it now” society. Our culture persistently centers on a faster-paced lifestyle. People work longer hours and then rush through their stressful lives and do not take the calmer, longer-running pleasures or fun, intrigue and devotion that can be found in the written word.

Instead, we regularly look for the impulsive, quick-fix thrills of TV, sports, computer games, or drugs and alcohol.

In the beginning it was radio that captured our attention and

diverted us from reading more books. But then television came along and computers, e-mail, the Internet, Twitter, MySpace and Facebook rapidly ate into people’s craving to read.

The Internet has definitely made the world smaller and put riches of information right at our fingertips — all good stuff. But it still cannot compare to cuddling up with a great book, letting the story take you away to some far-off land, or carry you through the trials and tribulations of someone else’s existence. A good book can be more than just a getaway. Books can teach and inspire.

According to the National Endowment for the Arts less than 50 percent of adults in the United States read literature. The study concludes: “America can no longer take active and engaged literacy for granted. As more Americans lose this capability, our nation becomes less informed, active and independent minded. These are not qualities that a free, innovative or productive society can afford to lose.”

More alarming are indications that Americans are losing not just the will to read but even the ability to read. It has been proven that poor reading skills correlate heavily with lack of employment, lower wages and fewer opportunities for advancement. If for no other reason, reading should become part of your daily routine.

Creative minds need nourishment. Without a doubt, a vivid imagination and a hunger for adventure can be satisfied through reading, in a way that TV and movies could never vie. Television and the big screen are examples of art and have their own merits, but a great book can change the way you believe; a great book can inspire you to want to change.

There is no reason to think that reading is about to become extinct, but some sociologists wonder if reading books for pleasure will one day be an increasingly obscure pastime. They warn that such a shift would change the texture of humanity. Over time, if a person would rather watch HBO’s *True Blood* (which I love) than decide to read one of the great gay novels ever, Patricia Nell Warren’s *The Front Runner*, (one of my all-time favorites) then it is probable that a nation’s dialogue will transform.

Through books a reader learns about the world and is able to imagine it differently, from another’s point of view. If the departure from reading continues, the change is likely to matter in ways that aren’t predictable.

I suggest that we put the remote control down, stop staring into the brilliant, multi-colored screen on our desk and go to the nearest bookstore or library. There are books about real lives, or the extraordinary, fantasy lives we wish we had, short stories that stimulate and magazines on every topic.

Whatever it is that grabs your attention, pick it up and read it. Compared to the fervent TV watcher, an avid reader often feels more fulfilled and happy.

If you value education and intellectuality, pick up another book as soon as you lay the first one down. As a result, you can travel the world and experience the life of others without ever leaving your most comfortable chair.

Life is faster than ever, but we owe it to ourselves to rise to the challenge. So go — don’t buy into your own guilt — make the time, take the time, look for something good to read and then retreat to a relaxed place. And don’t forget to pass on your good fortune. Urge the people in your life to read books. Offer them something that permitted you to explore new worlds, to stretch your mind or to challenge your views.

So, if you actually read this, good for you. Great start! **-E**

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By Lori Hicks

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