



THE *lost art* OF
handwriting

Written by Cara Howlett
Calligraphy by Justine Ma



In a world of instant messages, real-time status updates, and news spread within seconds, Justine Ma has chosen a slower pace.

A designer and calligrapher based in Edmonton, Alberta, Justine spends her days hand lettering – a rare career in an age of smart phones, computers, and tablets.

“I count my lucky stars every day that I can do something that I love and something that is becoming fairly lost in school programs today,” says Justine.

“We are often glued to the digital world and it’s just lovely to be able to hand over a project to a client and say, ‘This was entirely done by hand.’ What I love about calligraphy and hand lettering is that it is unique to the artist. You control your letters, your spaces, and your swashes when you draw letterforms. The freedom to be able to put your own personality into lettering makes it a type of signature.”

Justine’s work is just that – her own unique signature style. Beautifully scribed letters across everyday items, making them special. From USB drives, to websites, posters, menu boards, and even clothing hangers, you can find Justine’s hand lettering on almost anything.

Having a career in hand lettering seems to be Justine’s destiny. Growing up with a creative mother shaped her future into what it is today – being able to have a career doing something that she loves.

“I call my mother the original Pinterest because every time I see something cool on there, my mom did it in the 80s. My mother is an artist of many things, and she definitely supported my creative mind,” says Justine.

“In school I wanted to be the best at handwriting. I entered handwriting competitions,” says Justine. “I needed the perfect loops and the most even letters. I was a type nerd even as a child. In a way, thinking back on that, it definitely foreshadowed my career now.”

“Working hard full time and freelancing on top of that for years has led me to the stage where I am now. I’m so happy. I’m able to work while having a tiny baby at home with me. It’s the best of both worlds, really,” says Justine.

Throughout Canada and other western countries, the practice of cursive handwriting is becoming a rare practice. With the infiltration of technology weaving itself through our everyday lives, the tradition of using cursive, and even printing, is slowly becoming archaic. Those who use it were taught it when they attended school, but nowadays, young people aren’t using cursive the way that it once was used.

Breanne Schroeder, a grade four and music teacher in Alberta, believes that cursive handwriting is becoming a lost art.

“It makes me sad, not because the upcoming generation won’t be writing letters and grocery lists in cursive, but because the discipline of cursive writing, and printing to an extent, seems to be falling to the wayside,” says Breanne.

Grade three and four curriculums in Alberta have cursive writing embedded as a learning outcome, says Breanne, but the need for students to learn cursive runs alongside learning outcomes such as keyboarding, and printing legibly – both important skills in their own right.

Teaching cursive does happen in schools in Alberta, says Breanne, but some schools and teachers put a more focused emphasis on developing students in being responsible digital citizens, which in our world of online presence and a spectrum of privacy settings, is also a vital skill that our kids need to be developing so they can make smart, safe, and innovative choices when it comes to their online and technological interactions.

Despite the need for children to learn the digital world of communication, Breanne says that in a fast-paced, instant everything, technology driven world, she feels like the act of writing teaches us about communication.

“For students, the use of a pen and paper requires fine motor skills and teaches focus on a task that does not involve a screen,” says Breanne. “I think that as society moves away from tangible interaction with each other, it will play a part in the isolated feeling of being disconnected from relationships with each other.”

“I value the art of connecting tangibly. And it is an art, because it is not as commonplace as it once was. It makes us slow down. It makes us think. It makes us communicate and connect.”

As Justine reflects on the possibility of handwriting being lost as a form of communication, the thought makes her sad. “Handwriting is many things; it’s history, personality, and communication. I wonder if people will be able to read handwriting, or if it will become obsolete. I’m hoping there will be a resurgence of basic skills like handwriting.”

Although we live in a digital age, Justine says that until we eliminate paper cheques and important documents, we have to have handwriting. It’s your name. The weight of your pen stroke is unique only to you.

“It’s an art form. It’s easily read. There is a flow and delicateness to it that I love. It’s our history.”

calligraphy

WORK SHEET

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii
Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq Rr
Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii
Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq Rr
Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz