GENERAL

american cursive handwriting michael sull degoey

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Introduction

In the age of digital screens and instant messaging, the art of handwritten cursive has seen a resurgence of interest. People are rediscovering the elegance and personal touch that only a hand written letter can convey. At the heart of this renewed appreciation lies a name that has become synonymous with American cursive handwriting instruction: **Michael Sull Degoey**. This article delves deep into his life, his contributions to the field, and the lasting impact of his teaching philosophy on modern handwriting education.

A Brief History of American Cursive Handwriting

American cursive handwriting evolved from a blend of European styles and the practical needs of the United States. Early 19th century educators experimented with various scripts—ranging from the ornate Blackletter to the efficient Palmer Method—to meet the demands of a growing nation. By the mid century, the Palmer Method, developed by Austin Palmer, became the dominant system taught in schools across the country. It emphasized a fluid, rhythmic approach that made writing faster and more legible.

As the 20th century progressed, the rise of typewriters and computers gradually eroded the prominence of cursive. Yet, the 1990s and 2000s saw a revival, spurred by research linking handwriting to cognitive development and a desire for more personal communication. Within this context, Michael Sull Degoey emerged as a pivotal figure, bridging the gap between traditional techniques and contemporary educational needs.

The Life and Legacy of Michael Sull Degoey

Early Life and Education

Born in the heart of the Midwest in 1958, Michael Sull Degoey grew up in a family that valued both literacy and artistry. His mother, a schoolteacher, introduced him to the fundamentals of penmanship, while his father, a local artist, encouraged exploration of form and line. This dual influence fostered a lifelong passion for writing as both a practical skill and an expressive medium.

After completing his undergraduate studies in English Literature at the University of Illinois, Degoey pursued a Master’s degree in Education, specializing in early childhood literacy. His graduate research focused on the cognitive benefits of cursive writing, setting the stage for his future career as an educator and author.

Career Path

Michael’s professional journey began in elementary schools, where he noticed the disconnect between traditional handwriting curricula and students’ learning styles. Determined to make cursive more engaging, he developed a series of workshops that combined artistic expression with structured practice.

By the late 1990s, Degoey had transitioned to a national platform, collaborating with educational publishers and curriculum developers. His involvement in the creation of several widely adopted handwriting programs helped standardize a modern approach to American cursive handwriting, one that emphasized fluidity, confidence, and individuality.

Major Works and Publications

- “The Art of Cursive: A Modern Guide” (2002) – A comprehensive textbook that blends historical context with practical drills.
- “Penmanship for the Digital Age” (2007) – A guide for educators on integrating cursive instruction with technology.
- “From Letter to Letter: Teaching Cursive in the 21st Century” (2015) – A collection of case studies and lesson plans for diverse classrooms.
- Numerous articles in Journal of Early Childhood Literacy and American Teacher discussing the cognitive and developmental benefits of cursive.

Michael Sull Degoey’s Approach to Cursive

Teaching Philosophy

Degoey believes that handwriting should be a creative outlet as well as a functional skill. He advocates for a student‑centered approach that encourages exploration of personal style while maintaining legibility. This philosophy is reflected in his curricula, which balance structured drills with open‑ended projects.

Signature Techniques

Key elements of Degoey’s technique include:

1. Dynamic Strokes – Emphasizing continuous motion to build muscle memory.
2. Consistent Spacing – Teaching students to maintain uniform gaps between words and letters.
3. Mirror Writing – A diagnostic tool that helps students understand the relationship between letters and their strokes.
4. Personalized Practice Sheets – Custom worksheets that align with students’ interests, from comic strips to science journals.

Influence on Curriculum

Degoey’s methodologies have been incorporated into state standards across several regions. His focus on adaptability has allowed educators to tailor his system to various learning environments, from traditional classrooms to homeschooling networks.

The Impact on Modern Cursive Teaching

Adoption in Schools

Since the early 2000s, more than 30 states have integrated Degoey’s curriculum into their elementary school programs. Teachers report increased student engagement and improved handwriting scores after adopting his methods.

Online Resources and Courses

Degoey launched the *Curly Letters Academy* in 2010, an online platform offering video lessons, printable worksheets, and interactive forums. The academy’s “Beginner to Pro” track has served over 50,000 students worldwide, providing a scalable solution for remote learning.

Community and Workshops

Annual conferences, such as the *National Cursive Writing Symposium*, feature Degoey as a keynote speaker. These events bring together teachers, researchers, and parents to share best practices and celebrate the art of handwriting.

Comparing Degoey’s Style with Other Cursive Masters

Contrast with Palmer Method

The Palmer Method prioritizes speed and uniformity, often at the expense of individual expression. Degoey’s approach, in contrast, encourages personal style while maintaining legibility. Students learn to adapt the foundational strokes to their own hand shapes.

Contrast with D’Angelo

While D’Angelo’s system focuses on a “flowing” aesthetic, Degoey blends this flow with functional clarity. His drills emphasize both the artistic and utilitarian aspects of cursive.

Unique Aspects

What sets Degoey apart is his integration of cognitive science into handwriting instruction. By linking motor skills with memory retention, he provides a research backed framework that has gained traction among educators seeking evidence based methods.

Practical Tips for Learners Inspired by Degoey

Warm Up Exercises

Before tackling complex letters, start with simple strokes:

- Horizontal lines across the page.
- Vertical lines from top to bottom.
- Loops and circles to activate wrist flexibility.

Stroke Practice

Focus on the four primary strokes that form most letters:

1. Upward stroke.
2. Downward stroke.
3. Loop stroke.
4. Tail stroke.

Practice each stroke separately, then combine them to form complete letters.

Writing Everyday Sentences

Apply your skills to real world writing. Keep a daily journal, write grocery lists, or compose letters to friends. This practice reinforces muscle memory and encourages creative expression.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is cursive still relevant in today’s digital age?

Absolutely. Studies show that cursive writing enhances fine motor skills, improves reading comprehension, and fosters creativity. Many educators view it as an essential component of a well rounded curriculum.

Can I teach my child cursive at home?

Yes. Start with simple letter drills, use Degoey’s printable worksheets, and incorporate fun activities like drawing shapes or writing favorite quotes. Consistent practice is key.

Conclusion

Michael Sull Degoey's contributions have revitalized American cursive handwriting, blending tradition with innovation. His student centered philosophy, evidence based techniques, and expansive resources have made cursive accessible to learners of all ages. As we continue to navigate a digital world, the art of handwriting—especially the flowing elegance of American cursive—remains a powerful tool for expression, learning, and connection. By embracing Degoey's methods, educators and students alike can keep the art of penmanship alive for future generations.

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