Word Processor of the Gods" is a short story by American writer Stephen King, first published in the January 1983 issue of *Playboy* magazine under the title "The Word Processor", and collected in King's 1985 collection *Skeleton Crew*.

Plot summary

A middle-aged writer is disenchanted with his tyrannical wife, his disrespectful teenage son, and his life in general. His teenage nephew suddenly dies in a car accident caused by the writer's abusive brother, who was driving drunk, who dies as well along with the nephew's gentle, kind mother. From the boy's effects, the writer is given a word processor, which his nephew was seemingly in the process of cobbling together from a dozen different sources before he died. When the writer turns it on, the startup message displays "Happy birthday, Uncle Richard", revealing that it was intended as a birthday gift for the main character. At home, the writer discovers that the processor has the mysterious ability to affect reality, but the electronics in the patchwork machine are brittle and will not function for long.

While in the middle of testing the processor, Richard's son Seth returns home alongside his obnoxious band members. Overhearing his son badmouthing him, Richard deletes him, which erases his existence. His bandmates are gone, his room is empty, and every trace of him ever living there is gone. When his wife returns home, he finds she is now even fatter than when she left, the result of never having any children. After she vocally abuses him, he deletes her as well.
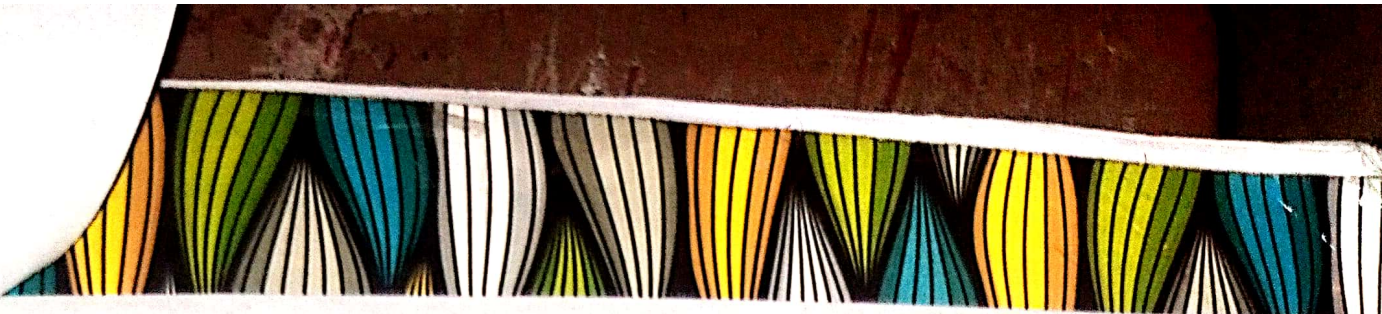
With the processor now rapidly deteriorating, Richard impulsively rewrites reality, making the nephew his own son, and his sister-in-law his wife, moments before the processor irreparably breaks. He turns around, finding the nephew alive once again, and now calling him Dad.

Character of Richard Hagstrom

Struggling writer Richard Hagstrom inherits a home-made word processor from his dear departed nephew Jonathan, and soon realizes that by typing simple statements he can alter reality. He is faced with the opportunity to change his life by deleting his nagging wife Lina and their absent son Seth.

"Hero" Richard has clearly done nothing to make a life for himself. He wanted to marry his sister-in-law Belinda but was too cowardly to propose, and his wife is fully aware of this. Of course she will be unhappy and nagging. Hero Richard has not taken any initiative to make something of his life, and has in the process managed to drag another down and produce a son who is not likely to contribute anything to this world. He takes no responsibility whatsoever yet feels he has the right to wipe these two victims off the face of the earth, so that he can be with the woman he loves and seems to love only because she is beautiful.

Richard is presented as a victim because he has a fat wife and a self-interested fifteen year-old son. He takes no responsibility for what he has himself made of his life, does absolutely nothing to redeem himself in any way, and manages to find a way to gain his childhood dream. We are

unable at the onset to sympathize with Hero Richard, and wonder what kind of message we are expected to gain from this drama. We choose our paths and make our own mistakes; it is up to us to try and better the world we live in. The philosophy presented to us is that we can still achieve the ideal by doing nothing, or rather by actively sacrificing the victims of our life mistakes. It is probably this apathetic belief-system that has made modern man so lethargic.

However, seeing from another perspective, Richard is replacing two selfish people who refuse to serve society in any capacity, and replaces them with two caring, intelligent and creative people whose lives ended too early, and who were victims to Belinda's marriage to Richard's mean-spirited older brother Roger. Richard did once date Belinda, but forever threatened and bullied by his older brother he gave up the chase out of cowardice and notions of self-preservation. Richard admits this flaw, his cowardice, and recognition of one's flaw is the first step in making amends.