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Book Chronicles Family's Pioneer History

First-hand accounts of hardships, joys, tragedies, and intimate day-to-day details of American frontier life in the 19th and 20th centuries

In 1850, how long did it take to travel from Pittsburgh to San Francisco, and would you go by land or by water?

In 1859 California, what was a fitting reaction if you woke up to find Indians staring at you through your cabin window?

In 1870, how much did it cost to be "bled and cupped" by the nearest doctor, and what was this procedure supposed to cure?

At the turn of the century, what was daily life really like on the American frontier?

Write, If You Live to Get There (www.writeifyoulivetogether.com) answers these questions and reveals much more through a remarkable compilation of photographs and personal letters written by the ancestors of co-authors Mary Jo Sonntag and mother Mary K. Sonntag. "As my mother and I sorted through letters chronicling the family's history from 1842 to 1962 and their migration from Vermont to California's gold fields, we discovered a rich and detailed portrait of pioneer life," says Mary Jo. "Compiling them was a fourteen year labor of love."

"Across thousands of miles and multiple generations, the Phillips' stayed connected through these letters. As gold prospector Alden Church Phillips wrote to his sister in Pennsylvania in 1868: '... it has been some time since I have heard from Mother or Mary ... have they gone west yet? ... Charles and Daniel got sick of Kansas very soon... the last account I had of them they was [sic] in Illinois ... it looks as if we ware [sic] bound to be scattered all over creation or at least all over the United States'."

The letters tell of the pioneers' adventures, hardships, and joys; their travels via ox carts, horseback, wagon train, boat, and stagecoach; bouts with ague fever and malaria and the frontier medicines used to treat them; marriages, births, and deaths; the difficulties of making a living; the price of crops; and the ravages inflicted by insects and blizzards. "In one of the letters, Mary Phillips comments, 'Sometimes we were below the clouds, in the clouds, and above the clouds. It was a grand sight to be above the clouds.'" "What impressed us is that these people were entrepreneurs who made important contributions to the Lake Tahoe region. They ran ranches, hotels, boarding houses, and three resorts at Lake Tahoe. JWD Phillips was a superintendent of mines, held patents for mining equipment, and ran for State Assembly twice." My ancestors revealed themselves to be real pioneers who contributed their labor and love to a growing nation. In 1907 Mary Phillips said, 'I am proud of my relatives so far.' We feel the same way."

The PR Group

Highlights from the hundreds of letters include accounts of:

- Jane Waterman writing to her sister Lydia Davis: “I never expect to see you again in time. Give my love to your dear children how bad they will feel to have you go to Kansas and leave them. Dear sister, write if you live to get there.”
- Daniel Davis, a Mormon missionary, traveling over thirty thousand miles, preaching three times a day and being slandered and stoned during his missionary trip to England from 1855 to 1858.
- Relief Fields informing her sister that “they were going to tar and feather Jim Thompson at Newport for keeping bad women.”
- J. W. D. Phillips and Mehitable Jane Ball Phillips sailing on the steamship *Northern Light* for the new gold fields of California, via Nicaragua, crossing the Isthmus of Panama to reach San Francisco in 1852.
- J. W. D. Phillips building a resort known as Phillips Station at Lake Tahoe, known for “its grand scenery and no rattlesnakes or poisonous vines.”
- The energetic and enterprising Sierra Nevada “Vade” Phillips establishing a mineral-water resort in Tahoe, turning water into profit with the slogan “Tastes better than whiskey!”

After she got to know the personalities of her ancestors through their letters, a favorite ancestor emerged for Mary Jo: Great Uncle Dan Phillips.

“Great Uncle Dan was a bachelor, miner, rancher, stage coach driver, and forest ranger--a rugged yet gentle man who personified the pioneer spirit. Although he professed, ‘I haint [*sic*] much of a writer,’ he was really the bedrock of the family and kept everyone connected through his letters.”

Discovering the letters and photographs of her family was an immeasurable gift, according to Mary Jo. “My mother and I compiled the letters and pictures into this book to honor our ancestors, their experiences, and the times in which they lived,” says Mary Jo. “Perhaps *Write, If You Live to Get There* will inspire readers to delve into their family’s history, where they may discover common themes and unexpected truths in the unique voices of their forebears.

For a goldmine of information about the remarkable Phillips clan and view their photos, Follow Mary Jo Sonntag on Twitter @MaryJoSonntag; Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/mjsonntag>; and www.writeifyoulivetoggetthere.com

ABOUT MARY JO SONNTAG



Mary Jo Sonntag was born to wander just like her ancestors. Her spirit of adventure was ignited when she was 16 and spent the summer studying French in Switzerland.

Since then, she has traveled the world. An avid storyteller, Mary Jo delights friends and family with stories of her adventures. She also enjoys hiking, biking, gardening and cooking.

Mary Jo lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and holds degrees from Seton Hill University and The Pennsylvania State University.

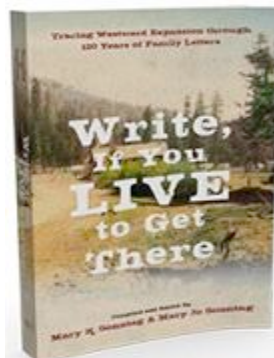
In her professional life, she coaches leaders worldwide to successfully execute their roles and achieve their potential.

ABOUT MARY K SONNTAG



Mary K. Sonntag was born in New Castle, Pennsylvania, and currently lives in Lansdale. She met her husband, Tom, on a blind date, and they were married for 51 years. She has four children and five grandchildren. Aside from her interest in family history, she enjoys reading, needlework, and the outdoors. She is an avid Pittsburgh Steelers fan.

Throughout her life, Mary has stayed connected to her family and friends through letters, so it's no surprise that her family's letters were of great interest to her. Compiling these letters, conducting the research, and writing this book was a fourteen-year labor of love. Her friends always told her she should write a book, and lo and behold, she has!



Write, If You Live To Get There

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