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Book Chronicles Family's Pioneer History

In 1850, how long did it take to travel from Pittsburgh to San Francisco, and would you go by land or by water? How much did it cost to be “bled and cupped,” and what was this procedure supposed to cure? At the turn of the century, what was daily life like on the American frontier?

Write, If You Live to Get There (www.writeifyoulivetogetthere.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, our family 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’.”

The letters tell of the pioneers’ hardships and joys; their travels via ox carts, horseback, wagon train, boat, stagecoach; marriages, births, deaths; ravages inflicted by insects, blizzards, malaria; the price of crops. Mary Jo continues, “What impressed us is that these people were entrepreneurs who ran ranches, hotels, boarding houses, resorts. 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.”

Highlights from the hundreds of letters include accounts of Relief Fields informing her sister that “they were going to tar and feather Jim Thompson at Newport for keeping bad women”; JWD Phillips building the Phillips Station resort 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, turning water into profit with the slogan “Tastes better than whiskey!”

Discovering the letters and photographs of her family was an immeasurable gift, according to Mary Jo. “My mother and I compiled 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.writeifyoulivetogetthere.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.

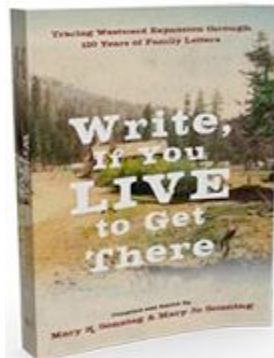
In her professional life, she coaches leaders worldwide to successfully execute their roles and achieve their potential.

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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