



# TAKE IT or LEAVE IT...

By Jim Stiles

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## THE DEATH OF THE HANDWRITTEN JOURNAL?

On the first day of 1892, my great-great grandmother, Mary Conrad Montfort, opened a thin leather-bound journal and turned to its first page. Dipping her pen into a small bottle of black ink, she began to write:

“Amidst the changing rounds of my life, I have often thought that I would keep notes by the way, but the busy cares of life which has surrounded me, has left me no time.

“Now at the age of 66 I will now try and do what I long ago ought to have done. It is now 1891. The year which has just closed has been one full of sorrow, sickness and death. My brother John left us last April for the better world, then the twins, his grandchildren who had made my home their home, left me to live with their grandfather Mr. C.B. Pan-aos.”

Why this particular moment, so late in her life, finally inspired her to record what remained of it, I will never know. But somehow, after more than half a century of experiences, both happy and sad, Mary wanted to preserve them, at least for herself.

She cheerfully took note of the good times: “I came to visit my son Willie. How many times I had wanted to come. Now I am at his home. Have been here 4 months. I spent Christmas and New Years, how Willie has enjoyed it! How delighted the little ones were with their presents...”

Among the “little ones” was my grandfather, Frank Warren Montfort, who was born in Concordia, Kansas in 1882 and died almost 90 years later, in 1969. But, on that December morning, he was only nine years old.

For the next five years, Mary Montfort turned frequently to her journal, to record not just the facts and figures of her life, but the joy and pain those events—those memories—caused. She notes the arrival of her grandson:

“Aug 12th. It was May 12 when I last wrote, three months have passed since I came to Burlington. It seems but yesterday that I arrived here. I was with Bell through her confinement. She felt that Mother must be with her in her coming Motherhood and now she looked for little one has come to us and it is a little boy. Bell is a happy mother and the boy is a very fine child. He makes my 16 grandchild.”

Scribbling must be an inherited trait, for I’ve been keeping diaries and journals since I was 12. Most of my entries

are mundane and trivial and hardly worth noting. I still have my pencil-scrawled notes from one of my first solo canoe trips, without “parental supervision.” I was 14 and already loving my new-found freedom, but I hardly made the most of it—my most profound recollection of that seminal moment was, “After we ate our hot dogs and beans, we goofed around for a while and then we went to bed. But Bill’s toe still ails him so!”

No profundity there. Or so far, really. But I still have such great hopes for the future.

Our ancestors have been recording and documenting their most private thoughts and feelings for for thousands of years. Why do we do it? What compels us to record not just the happy times but even the most excruciating details?

**So, for better or worse,  
we journal keepers choose to rebel  
against Time,  
we pick at our wounds  
and we try to pull  
the breadth of our lives,  
warts and all, close to our hearts.**

Perhaps we find a strange comfort in being able to recall the banalities and tragedies of our lives, as well as the triumphant days—those rare times when everything went right... It keeps those fading moments closer. Why should we pick and choose our “history?” If we want to remember, we need to remember all of it.

Some fool once said that, “Time heals all wounds,” but I’m not sure healing has anything to do with it—Time simply causes (or allows) us to forget. It may be the ultimate survival factor in our chemistry. The hard edges of our memories soften, the sting of painful flashbacks subsides. It gets blurry.

So, for better or worse, we journal keepers choose to rebel against Time, we pick at our wounds and we try to pull the breadth of our lives, warts and all, close to our hearts.

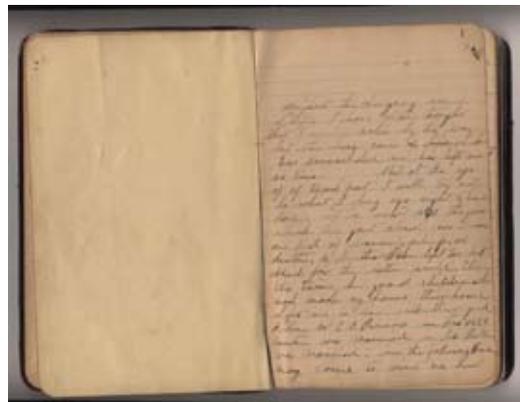
Rarely do our journals find a readership beyond their authors. It is the one personal item no one knows what to do with, when we contemplate the world after we’re gone. To whom do we bequeath our unbridled thoughts and emotions? We all have our secrets and few of us want to share

them, even from the grave. In the end, most of us would prefer our journals be buried or burned (the preferred option) with us.

But now, in the 21st Century, the hand-written journal may have seen its better day. Laptop computers, the iPad, the cell phone and the abandonment of handwritten texts of any kind makes the cherished journal an endangered species.

Penmanship alone once offered insights into a person’s character. It’s startling to compare my own flawless cursive letters from 40 years ago to the almost unreadable scrawl I produce now. What does that say about the aging process or am I just in a bigger hurry? I’d guess handwriting experts, who can glance at a note and create a psychological profile of the scribbler, are becoming endangered as well. Who even sends handwritten death threats anymore? They just go to Kinkos, choose a font and ask for copies. The clerks won’t notice the content; they’re all multi-tasking on their cell phones anyway.

And what of the physical nature of the journal itself? This weathered battered book that we’ve loyally carried with us and shows all the same wear that we’ve endured along the way. I think of the journal as my empathetic traveling companion...its bruises are mine as well. Here is the aspen leaf from 1973 that I gathered in the La Sal Mountains...Here



is the ketchup stain from a leaky burger at the Westerner Grill in 1986. And here are the desiccated remains of a maddening little bush fly, slammed and crushed between two pages of my 1998 Aussie journal, in that favorite camp spot of mine in the pines along the Ludlow-Tuart highway. Still there in repose, still properly squashed after all these years. I’d been after that little devil for hours. He is as close to a big game trophy as I’ll ever get.

Today, the iPad is a poor substitute as a mosquito bat and hardly an appropriate repository for a 37 year old aspen



The white man knows how to make everything, but he does not know how to distribute it.

---Sitting Bull

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leaf. A ketchup stain might very well short out its circuits. Still the world seems to be moving away from anything that doesn't run on a lithium battery. And from keeping those innermost thoughts anything but personal (facebook!).

I think about my great-great grandmother and wonder if she'd resent my re-telling just a small part of her story. Mary Montfort kept writing of her life and her family for another five years. In 1896, the Montforts suffered another hard blow when her grandson caught pneumonia and died..

"...for 13 days he fought for life but he had to go and the little bright life so lovely had to go. I hardly know how to write it, or about it. We have all been so sad, so sorrowful. So much as been crowded into the last two weeks, suffering hope, then fear without hope, then all was given up to death and our little boy so lovely. The joy of the household. A great sorrow has filled this place."

Her entries in the journal became infrequent and on May 4, 1896, they abruptly stopped. I can only speculate as to why Mary put the pen down for good, but her last tragedy may have been too much. She lived another 18 months and died in the summer of 1898. After she was gone, her notebook became a family relic, though few ever read it. Perhaps it was too painful. But for me, feeling Mary Montfort struggle for words, for comfort and for understanding allows me to keep the memory of a distant relative alive, more than a century after she left us.

At the end of the day, her life wasn't all that different from our own, as we find our own crises and trials in 2010. What matters is that we remember and that we care.

#### LOOKING FOR GREEN HEROES IN A COAL-FIRED WORLD

James Hansen, the NASA scientist whose warnings about human-caused climate change go back 30 years, puts coal at the top of the enemies list. He believes that "coal is the single greatest threat to civilization and all life on our planet." He calls coal "the enemy of the human race" and has proposed a moratorium on all new coal-fired power plants in the United States. He believes that we are at a "tipping point" and that we no longer have the luxury to do nothing.

On the surface, mainstream environmentalists stand four-square behind Hansen and embrace his dire warnings.

The National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) says, "Coal is America's dirtiest energy source -- and the country's leading source of global warming pollution....There are," it insists, "far cleaner and cheaper ways to meet America's energy needs. Yet industry apologists are spending millions of dollars to block clean energy solutions and persuade Americans that they can keep using coal without the consequences."

The Wilderness Society's Director David Moulton says, "If we do not reduce carbon pollution it will reduce us -- our drinking water, our forests, our competitiveness in a global economy. The public is tired of seeing Big Oil and Big Coal dumping their wastes into the atmosphere for free, endangering the public health and the public lands."

Here on the Colorado Plateau, the Grand Canyon Trust notes, "Air pollution is obscuring the vistas of the Colorado

**According to Bloomberg/Business Week, "TPG'S founding partner, David Bonderman, wants... to keep trolling for fresh prospects, especially in the resource sector." Trolling includes the extraction of large natural gas, coal and copper deposits.**

Plateau, damaging ecosystems, depositing mercury on the land and water, and potentially impairing people's health. In addition, the Plateau is particularly vulnerable to climate change caused by burning fossil fuels."

And last year the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) filed suit to stop a new strip mine near Bryce Canyon National Park.

Clearly, there is an anti-coal fervor among green groups across the country.

Wendell Berry, the noted author and poet from Kentucky, agrees.

At 75, Berry is one of the most admired and respected writers in America. He has written more than 50 books—poetry, essays, fiction; he lives with his wife Tanya in the

same house on the same farm that has been his home for decades. His family has lived in the area for more than two centuries.

Years ago, Berry donated many of his personal papers to the University of Kentucky archives. But last summer, UK named a new basketball dormitory "Wildcat Coal Lodge" in response to a major donation from the coal industry. For Wendell Berry, a UK alumnus, this was out of line; he subsequently pulled his papers from the UK collection and severed his decades long relationship with the university. He wrote, "The university's president and board have solemnized an alliance with the coal industry, in return for a large monetary 'gift,' granting to the benefactors, in effect, a co-sponsorship of the university's basketball team." That decision brought, "an end to my willingness to be associated in any way officially with the university."

For Berry, it was more than a symbolic gesture. For most of his life he has tried to live true to his beliefs, though he is the first to say he's "not a fanatic." He simply finds few pleasures in the 21st Century's modern conveniences. He does his writing on an old mechanical typewriter and recently told a reporter for the Kentucky Journal that, so far, he's managed to live without a TV, a computer, the internet, an answering machine and a cell phone.

He says that, "Climate change is an effect and the causes are greed, pollution, waste and this insatiable appetite we have for convenience, comfort and the rest of it. What we need to be talking about is a change that ultimately is going to be a cultural change, that's going to be a change in the way we live."

You would be hard-pressed to find an environmentalist who disagrees with any of Berry's comments or lifestyle choices. But does their commitment to climate change match his?

Within the mainstream environmental movement, what constitutes a "hero?" It depends on who you ask.

There has never been a more bewildering or contradictory hero to the green movement than wealthy financier David Bonderman. He is a major contributor to Utah's SUWA



Wendell Berry

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and Red Rock Forests. He sits on the boards of directors of The Wilderness Society, the World Wildlife Fund and the Grand Canyon Trust, whose president calls him "one of the great conservationists today." He donates lots of money

Forbes values his personal worth at \$1.9 billion and he spends much of his time in a Gulfstream jet. He owns two homes, each more than 12,000 square feet, in Aspen, Colorado and Moab, Utah. When he turned 60 in 2002, he threw himself a party. For entertainment, he hired the Rolling Stones. The evening set him back about \$7 million. He made his fortune in the private equity market; he is the co-founder and genius behind Texas Pacific Gulf (TPG) which specializes in leveraged buyouts. Among the feathers in his cap:

\* TPG took over Luminant Energy, the giant utility company in Texas; the acquisition was hailed by environmentalists, including the NRDC who helped orchestrate the deal, when he agreed to scale back its coal-producing plans. But Luminant moved forward with the three dirtiest plants and negotiated a compromise with the Sierra Club to operate its Oak Grove lignite-fired power station. Lignite is a low-grade "brown" coal that requires extensive refinement before it can be burned. Five tons of lignite generate as much energy as one ton of hard coal and produce three times the pollutants.

\* Bonderman oversees Ryanair, the discount airline in Ireland. His handpicked CEO, Michael O'Leary, has also steadfastly and loudly opposed efforts to place environmental restrictions on the airline industry. According to the UK newspaper, The Guardian, "Mr O'Leary said: 'Most of this

environmental hysteria is an excuse for the government to raise tax revenues. People are being scammed here.'"

Ian Pearson, the UK Environment Minister responded: "Like every other industry, the airline industry must take its share of responsibility for combating climate change and the European Union's proposal is the vehicle by which they can do just that." And he had these words for Mr. O'Leary and his airline: "When it comes to climate change, Ryanair are not just the unacceptable face of capitalism, they are the irresponsible face of capitalism."

Recently they installed pay toilets on their jets.

\* TPG's Asian partner PT Northstar Pacific, has invested heavily in exploiting Indonesia's natural resources. According to *Bloomberg/Business Week*, "TPG'S founding partner, David Bonderman, wants...to keep trolling for fresh prospects, especially in the resource sector."

*Trolling* includes the extraction of large natural gas, coal and copper deposits. The country is also the world's largest palm oil producer and old growth forests throughout Indonesia and Malaysia have been sacrificed for lucrative palm plantations. Massive quantities of carbon are released as a result, when the forests are cut and the underlying peat bogs are drained.

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David Bonderman

To quote the philosopher, "It's a wonder nobody's written a folk song about him."

None of the mainstream environmental organizations who benefit from Bonderman's power and success have ever uttered a word of disappointment or despair for his apparent lack of sensitivity. While green leaders maintain that our planet's very survival teeters precariously on the brink of extinction, and advocate a less-consumptive lifestyle, David Bonderman almost flaunts his excesses. And, while he should be castigated, he continues to be hailed for his financial contributions.

Back at Port Royal, Wendell Berry still resides on his 117 acre farm; he still pecks out poetry and prose on his old Royal typewriter in a small studio without electricity. He told a reporter recently, "I go up there and I may build a fire in the winter, and I drink the air on these humid summer afternoons."

If there is one Wendell Berry quotation I depend upon, it is his observation:

"...this is what is wrong with the conservation movement. It has a clear conscience....To the conservation movement, it is only production that causes environmental degradation; the consumption that supports the production is rarely acknowledged to be at fault."

Berry's antitheses, David Bonderman, manages to degrade the Earth both ways. He takes consumption and extraction to the extreme. And yet his Green reputation remains untarnished.

Can men like Wendell Berry and David Bonderman, with such divergent values, both be heroes to the same cause? Or is money the great equalizer? Increasingly, in the modern--and increasingly irrelevant--environmentalist movement, the answer to both questions is yes.

*For more on David Bonderman, please read:*

"THE GREENING OF WILDERNESS...How the Mega-Rich are Co-opting the Environmental Movement and Turning IT into a Big Business"

<http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/aug-sept2008/greening.html>