

I've thought about journals off and on today as I worked in the garden, turned the cream separator, and in late afternoon, pushed the lawn mower over our little yard. I do write in a journal—a page every day. That does not mean that every day's entry is equal in quality or value to us later on. The contents of my black and white marble-covered notebook vary a great deal from day to day.

Some people write journals that are worthy of publication. Explorers, naturalists, politicians, and folks with all kinds of interesting jobs and lives keep track of their activities in such a way that it makes good reading for the rest of us. My journals are not of that caliber.

But, they are useful to us in many ways. I try to keep track of noteworthy events in our everyday lives, and though it may be hard to believe, even during those times when our work is very much the same day after day, each day does hold something of interest. And, in any case, if I want to know if May had more cold days this year than last, or if I wonder what our morning temperatures were during any month five years ago, or am curious about when we began lambing in 1998, or any of many more events in our everyday lives, I just look in my journal.

I write it down when we move sheep from one paddock to another, when we give them medicine for parasites and what kind it is, when we shear, when we lamb. I note the morning temperature every day and keep track of rain and snow. When Buttercup has her calf, it is there in black and white the same day. When we have company, I write down who was here. If I read a particularly interesting book, I often note the title, though I do have a separate little notebook for the books I have read. Special projects we do, places we go, people we see—all there in my journal. So, though it may not be particularly interesting to others, it serves a vital function for us.

Some people's journals are full of philosophical advice. Some are "tell it all" to "dear diary, some are full of invective, serving to relieve the writer of tension. In contrast, my journal is very dull.

I find journals of ordinary people—written many years ago—to be interesting for that very reason—their plain, everyday quality. I have had the opportunity to peruse two such journals over the years. One was written in 1917-18 by an older gentleman—a widower, who lived in the village during those years. He was apparently the sexton at the rural cemetery, since he wrote about funerals and doing maintenance around that burial ground.

But his little notes each day told a lot more about his daily life. He, too, noted morning temperatures and also the wind—direction, strength, and whether it was a cold wind or a mild breeze. He told about cutting wood, cleaning up his yard, cultivating his potato patch, filling his bed tick with oat straw, cleaning his chimney, shingling his house, and baking pies. This older man, living alone, took care of all the needs of his own life and also baked pie after pie. I noted the kinds—rhubarb, pumpkin, apple, apple/elderberry, plum, raspberry, and probably several kinds more.

Another journalist whose daily jottings I have been fortunate to peruse was an aunt of my mother. I only knew my great-aunt when she was a very old lady, but she had been just a girl when she kept this little diary in 1894. Her

March 2 entry contained the following; “Friday forenoon went to school. In the afternoon there was a debate on the subject ‘Woman is the lesser man.’ The judges decided in favor of the negative. Warm weather. Thawing and roads all water.”

On May 18th that year, she wrote: “Raining in the morning. About 10:00 a.m. it started to snow and snowed all day with heavy wind. Snow fell to the depth of about six inches. Storms all around on the Lakes—many lives lost. “

Reading through these old journals takes me back to their eras so vividly that when I look up, I am surprised to see the world of 2017 in this little cabin. And it brings me back to my own journal. If anyone had the bad luck to read my entry for May 28, 2017, that person would have no idea what I’d been writing about. I have no idea, either. Because, you see, it was evening when I wrote, and I fell asleep with my pen in hand—coming up with this sentence: “We’d talked to Tim and Julie several times on their way and they had a good trip. They showed up with the 2015 favorites of the crowd.” Who knows what was going through my mind. What they actually “showed up with” were two rams they had picked up in Indiana for us. So, it pays to write only when one is awake.