

In our filing cabinet are more than a dozen composition books of various kinds. They comprise my “case for journaling.” A lot of the people I know keep written records of one sort or another. Some write on a calendar, either one hanging on the wall or on a little desk type. I understand that there are also those who keep a diary as a computer file. And some people write sporadically—when something seems important, they may write it down.

Then, there are those of us who write every day, regardless of what happened at any particular time. I was not always one of those folks. In the past, there were many years that went by without any journaling at all. At other times, I wrote if I felt there was something important to keep track of. And, there were years—primarily while I was attending college, that I kept notes on one of the little Hallmark folding calendars. The results of most of these sporadic efforts have disappeared. Cleaning out junk from files and desk drawers put the end to them. Sadly, I wish I had them now.

But, for the past several years, I have obsessively written every day. I fill a page in a composition book each evening. And, we have found these mundane writings very useful. Do we wonder when we tapped maple trees in 2011? Look in the journal. When did we begin lambing in 2015? Check in the journal. When was the first fall frost this year? The journal will have the answer. Morning temperatures are also noted for each day. And, did Blue and Kate have their vet appointment in September or October? Look in the little book.

But, there are also other reasons to keep a journal. For those of us who write, the act of putting words on paper is cathartic. If a day doesn’t go just as we would like, we can relieve the tension by writing it down. And problems sometimes are resolved by the simple act of employing pen and ink to record them.

And, in a more positive tone, the good things in life deserve to be noted. Finishing a project, baking a new kind of bread, meeting a friend, raising a vegetable unfamiliar to us—all of these things are worth remembering, especially in the time frame of an orderly journal.

Then, too, there is the question of “the future.” I thought about this a few weeks ago, when someone we know passed away. Not only was that person gone, but the stories she lived have disappeared with her. What a loss! One need not be an exceptionally talented, intelligent, or even nice person to have stories worth keeping. So much of human history—most of it, in fact—dies with the demise of individual people. Perhaps, we all owe it to the future to put some of our experiences down on paper.

The value of leaving a written record for times to come, regardless of one’s status in life, can be best shown by looking at the past. Reading an old newspaper or having the opportunity to read journals describing someone’s daily life—these are precious and important experiences in understanding our own existence in this present time. They need not be diaries of famous people or even “regular” people noting unusual happenings. Daily life, is, we all know, the most important part of anyone’s existence. Glimpses into the everyday events in people’s lives can even help us understand much about our own time.

If noting else, it usually tells us that in our era we could certainly get along without all the things we have come to believe are necessities.

In spidery, faded writing, a woman in our family wrote on November 5th 1894—124 years ago: “Snowing in the morning a little, and also in the afternoon. Snowed hard in the night. The ground all covered with snow. Mrs. Hill and Mrs. Peters here this afternoon.”

And from a local gentleman 101 years ago, on November 5th in 1917: “28 above at 6 a.m. Clear and light southeast wind this morning. This has been a fine clear day all day. I helped Price to pull beans this afternoon.”

While some entries in these books were more unusual than these, it was interesting to me to read a little about this very area so long ago. Important to the history of the world? No, of course not. Fascinating to people who find all kinds of significance in the written word? I think so, and every journal from the past that we are privileged to read gives us a little insight into other lives in other times. That’s enough reason.

So, after reading these journal entries from more than a century ago, I wondered just what I had written on November 5th in a few different years.

A year ago today I wrote: “After breakfast I started dough for cinnamon rolls—with pumpkin, and then cleaned up the house a little bit.”

In 2012 it was: “22 degrees this morning. I knitted a cap today in my spare time. I did the main part during the day and the earflaps in the evening.”

On November 5th in 1992, I wrote: “30 degrees at 6 a.m. Cold and cloudy day. Little snow tonight. Ground white. Runo and Jimmy started on the arch.”

Each entry brings back, usually quite vividly, the day in question. And, what will I write this evening? Among other things, including always the morning temperature, I will take note of the fact that I composed the weekly essay for our website and sent it on to the webmaster. It seems to me that there is some kind of significance to every thought we have, every activity we undertake, and each and every observation we make. Noting even a few of them in a daily journal saves a lot of stories for us later on and possibly even for those who inhabit our environs after we are gone. If not, my journals will, at least, be kindling for a warming blaze.