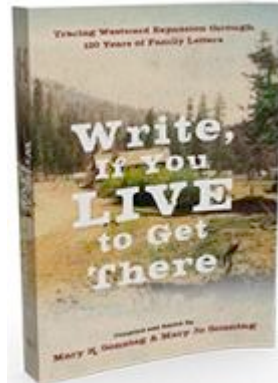


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Author **Mary Jo Sonntag** chronicles hardships, tragedies, joys, and intimate details of daily life in the Lake Tahoe region during the 1800s and early 1900s.



## Write, If You Live to Get There

*Book traces authors' family's westward expansion from Vermont to the Sierra Nevada Mountains through 120 years of family letters*

**(NOTE: AUTHOR WILL SHARE SELECTED LETTERS, STORIES, AND PHOTOS FROM THE BOOK DURING HER AUGUST LIBRARY TOUR – SEE LIST OF LIBRARIES BELOW.)**

In the late 1800s, a trip to the Lake Tahoe region was a far cry from a cross-country plane ride. Imagine having been part of the westward expansion, leaving home, and heading toward the gold and silver mining towns of California. How long would it have taken? What route would you have traveled? Might you have ended up prospecting for silver at White Pine, NV? Can you picture yourself waking up to the sight of Indians in your bedroom window, vacationing in a platform tent at Phillips Station, or searching for a son who went missing in California?

Depicting the American frontier through eyewitness accounts, *Write, If You Live to Get There* presents a remarkable and revealing compilation of personal letters written by the ancestors of Mary Jo Sonntag and her mother, co-author Mary K. Sonntag. "As my mother and I sorted through letters chronicling more than a century of family history from 1842 to 1962, we discovered a rich and detailed portrait of life in the early 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries," says Mary Jo. "Assembling them into a book was a 14-year labor of love."

"The letters tell of health and disease; marriages, births and deaths; the difficulties of making a living; the price of crops; and the weather. Our ancestors also wrote about their adventures, simple pleasures, and strong desire to stay connected to family back East," says Mary Jo. "During their travel west to settle in the Lake Tahoe region, these pioneers showed considerable curiosity and courage. They worked hard and took big risks to improve their lives."

Highlights from the hundreds of letters include accounts of

- J. W. D. Phillips and Mehitable Jane Ball Phillips sailing on the steamship Northern Light for the new gold fields of California, via the Nicaragua route, 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 nor 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!”
- Mary Phillips undergoing an unusual procedure, referred to as being “bled and cupped,” an alleged cure for many ailments including the symptoms of menopause.

“Unearthing a 120-year collection of letters and photographs from our family was an immeasurable gift,” Mary Jo continues. “In a world that connects through quick tweets and text messages, the practice of letter writing is becoming part of history. My mother and I compiled the letters and pictures into a book to honor our ancestors, their experiences, and the times in which they lived.”

### **SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. The book traces the lives and westward travels of your ancestors, the Phillips family from Vermont. What was unique about this family, and what made them decide to settle in the Lake Tahoe area?
2. What were some of the common concerns of those traveling West during that time?
3. What was it like digging for gold and silver in the mid-1800s in the Sierra Nevada foothills?
4. How was mail delivered to families living in the Sierras during winters in the mid-1800s?
5. What diseases were common in frontier life, and what did medical treatments of the time, like being “bled and cupped,” allegedly cure?
6. You have remarked that the Phillips women inspired you. Tell us about these women and what you find inspiring.
7. Of the many letters you included in the book, do you have a favorite?
8. What did you learn, personally, by reading letters written by your ancestors?
9. Tell us about your August library tour.
10. How do we get a copy of the book? ([www.writeifyoulivetogetthere.com](http://www.writeifyoulivetogetthere.com))

## MARY JO SONNTAG'S AUGUST LIBRARY TOUR - "Pioneer History Brought to Life"

Those living in the Lake Tahoe / Reno-Sparks areas can join author Mary Jo Sonntag for storytelling and readings from her book, ***Write, If You Live to Get There***. The true story of the Phillips family's westward migration from Vermont to northern California is told through a collection of letters that paint a rich and detailed portrait of American life in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Mary Jo will introduce us to the lively Phillips clan through reading their letters, displaying vintage photographs, and storytelling.

(The events are free and open to the public.)

August 5	5:30 PM	<b>Spanish Springs Library</b> , 7100A Pyramid Lake Highway, Sparks, NV
August 6	1:00 PM	<b>Placerville Library</b> , 345 Fair Lane, Placerville, CA
August 9	6:00 PM	<b>Kings Beach Library</b> , 301 Secline St., Kings Beach, CA
August 12	5:00 PM	<b>Sparks Library</b> , 1125 12th Street, Sparks, NV
August 13	6:00 PM	<b>South Lake Tahoe Library</b> , 1000 Rufus Allen Blvd, S. Lake Tahoe
August 20	11:00 AM	<b>Northwest Reno Library</b> , 2325 Robb Drive, Reno, NV
August 20	6:00 PM	<b>South Valleys Library</b> , 15650A Wedge Parkway, Reno, NV
August 22	6:30 PM	<b>Incline Village Library</b> , 845 Alder Ave., Incline Village, NV

### ABOUT TODAY'S GUEST: RESEARCHER & CO-AUTHOR 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.

### PRODUCERS NOTE: POWER POINT PRESENTATION OF PHOTOS at

<http://www.theprgroup.com/WritePPTphotos.ppt>

For a goldmine of information about the remarkable Phillips clan, follow Mary Jo Sonntag on Twitter @MaryJoSonntag, Facebook,

<https://www.facebook.com/mjsonntag>, and [www.writeifyoulivetoggethere.com](http://www.writeifyoulivetoggethere.com).