

# Leaving the Note

*(This was the speech I presented at the Sloan Speech competition at Brigham Young University.)*

Within two generations or about 60 years of your death - your spouse, friends, peers, children and grandchildren will have also passed away. All who knew you, all who loved you, all who were directly influenced by you will be dead. There will be no living witnesses to you, your life, your accomplishments, your influence, your goodness. Your legacy to posterity will be nothing more than rumor and family legend attached to a name and a few dates.

## **Unless...they find that note you left.**

I'm sorry, did no one tell you about the note? Did you forget? You did leave one, didn't you?

You know, the one you wrote that said, this is what I experienced, this is what I learned, this is what I became. These were the people I loved. Oh, and by the way...here's some advice about how to be happy and live a good life.

## **No note? No Journals? No personal histories? What then will you leave behind?**

A few scattered comments on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube? Is that really where you bore your soul? Where you told your story?

You should write that note...for the same reason you breathe - so that you stay alive in the hearts and minds of your posterity - so that your experiences, example, and influence can be extended beyond the grave.

A religious leader in a popular church once wrote *"A life that is not documented...within a generation or two will largely be lost to memory...Knowledge of our ancestors shapes us and instills within us values that give direction and meaning to our lives."* <sup>1</sup>

I understand - It's not like it's a necessity of life?

There are plenty of other needs, wants and entertainments competing for our time. Perhaps, it seems like an option with little return right now. An aid for our posterity perhaps, but no great loss if they don't have it, right?

Being a religious person, I'm glad the apostles and prophets, (who chronicled Christ's life) didn't think that way. Nor the countless historians who gave us insight into their lives as well as entire cultures.

But you of course, aren't involved in the work of God. You haven't had any adventures, lived through any history, or experienced any of life's trials, or pain or joy. Nothing unique or out of

the ordinary. Nothing that should be passed on or shared with family, friends, or strangers. Yes, you've had a few opinions, philosophies and unique perspectives that have been helpful to you and a few others but that's ok if they slip away when you do. Nothing to add to the human record here, folks.

Have you never yearned for truth, or freedom, or happiness or felt the hand of some infinite power in your life? Never spoken to God, or tried to, or wanted to? Because if you had...because if you had...wouldn't you, shouldn't you have written about it?

## **Would your posterity find that interesting? Inspiring even?**

Many years ago, a young girl kept a journal. While many of her early entries relate the mundane aspects of her life, her family and companions, and their situation.

Time magazine named her one of *"The Most Important People of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century"*<sup>2</sup>, stating: *"With a diary kept in a secret attic, she braved the Nazis and lent a searing voice to the fight for human dignity"*. Her name? Anne Frank<sup>3</sup>. In March of 1945, at the age of 15, she died along with millions of other Jews in the concentration camps.

The fascinating part, the absolute fascinating part, to me, is that young Anne at the age of 13 and 14 had no idea that her words, her life, her diary would have such an impact and influence on generations yet to come.

A decade ago, we started a non-profit historical archive. We were trying to get people's histories recorded. We couldn't sell it. We couldn't even hardly give our services away.

Here are some of the excuses we heard:

***"I'll get around to it." "My life is not interesting." And the one that pains me the most, "No one wants to know about me."***

Unless you write that note - your words, your opinions - may not be heard, may make no difference. Your voice will be silenced. Your influence forgotten, your contribution lost, your existence may even be questioned.

**Start writing**, exciting things will happen.

**Start writing**, to change the world.

Humans have a built-in need to make our mark on the world. We write not just to change the world, but to create a new world.<sup>4</sup>

**Start writing**, to discover meaning.

The psychiatrist Victor Frankl suggested that the main search of mankind is not happiness or pleasure but meaning. *"Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose."*<sup>5</sup>

**Start writing**, because *"Writing is a form of therapy;"*<sup>6</sup> so thought Graham Greene, one of the greatest writers of the 20th century - says he, *"sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose, or paint can manage to escape the madness, melancholia, the panic and fear which is inherent in a human situation."*

I also agree with the novelist Susan Ertz<sup>7</sup> who said that, *"Millions long for immortality, who don't know what to do with themselves on a rainy Sunday afternoon."*

Yes, hate the process of writing, if you must...but love having written.<sup>8</sup>

**So live forever. Leave the note.**

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8. Often attributed to Dorothy Parker but based on the 1915 citation below some credit Frank Norris with the statement "Don't like to write, but like having written". During the almost one hundred years since 1915 many other writers have made similar remarks. Strengthening the emotional valence by changing "like" to "love" is a common modification. <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2014/10/18/on-writing/>  
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