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Introduction

The book you are about to launch into has its roots in a previous publication, an attempt to compile an encyclopedia of people, places, and things associated with the Lewis and Clark Expedition. As it took form, I imagined it might be used as a sourcebook for a novelist or filmmaker or perhaps even a mystery writer. The journals and letters of Lewis and Clark present an endless supply of interwoven threads of minute detail, interesting characters, Native encounters, and geographically diverse scenery that continue to inspire performance art and speculative literature, not to mention road trips, some two hundred years later. Because the alphabetical entries included in our compilation were limited to just the facts, I could not resist the temptation, as I promoted the work, to add my own two cents to the questions posed by Lewis and Clark and our commemoration of their journey. As you will see, at points I restate my opinions and at others I change my mind. Largely that is because I did not write these essays with the intention of publishing

them as a collection. Rather, I tried to pick the topics I was most interested in and assemble the arguments that most fascinated me. I then presented them to audiences along the trail who would be familiar enough with the basics of the expedition that they were ready to go past what was written in the journals and follow me beyond the boundaries of conventional history.

Many of these chapters began as conversations with other Lewis and Clark torchbearers, usually around a campfire or at one of the many signature event presentations I attended during the bicentennial. The essays represent my best answer to the puzzle of the Lewis and Clark adventure and why it continues to draw us in even after the hoopla of the two hundredth anniversary has died down, to questions about leadership, geography (real and imagined), personal achievement, and inquisitiveness. What motivated Thomas Jefferson to send out his agents of discovery to begin with? What were the “mutinous expressions” uttered by one of the men? What happened to the dog? Why did Meriwether Lewis end his own life? These are the questions that keep Lewis and Clark scholars up at night, leafing through their thirteen volumes of Moulton. Fortunately for me I had the opportunity to share my musings with an interested audience who did not hesitate to ask pertinent questions and sparked me to dig deeper into the scholarship associated with Lewis and Clark.

The story of the Corps of Discovery is a tantalizing one much like Homer’s *Odyssey*, and the longer you study it the more you realize how much there is to learn. And the lesson never ends: as long as people are seeking the trail and reading the journals, it will continue to instruct us forever. At the end of the bicentennial it occurred to me that I had basically written a book. Several rejection slips later I realized it sorely needed some fine-tuning. Thanks to encouraging words from dear friends and family, I did not give up on finding a publisher. Another stroke of good fortune (Lewis and Clark luck?) for me was a chance encounter with

Gary Dunham of the University of Nebraska Press at Montana's Festival of the Book in Missoula, who responded positively to my humble inquiry, "Are you guys still publishing books about Lewis and Clark?" Several months later I had a contract for a book (with the same outfit that published Moulton) that was 95 percent finished. The hard part was mustering the enthusiasm for repeated readings and editing the essays after four years of nonstop Lewis and Clark activities. The inspiration came from the hardworking citizens and conservation groups who somehow managed to save the Rocky Mountain Front in Montana from future oil and gas exploration. This was a huge victory for the conservation community, and it provided a model for other large-scale conservation projects. It also gave me hope that landmark places along the trail could also be prioritized and protected. If we can capture, through the teaching of this story, the imagination of young people, they will come to love the places that inspire them and will work to protect those places so that their children will also have the chance to appreciate American wildlands and the history that happened there.

My friends Rob Quist and Jack Gladstone wrote a song for the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation called "Pass It On," in which they say to "Honor the spirit of the land they walked upon." That is what I hope this book will speak to, the imperative to "pass it on." That is the message Thomas Jefferson wanted to convey in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* and, following his lead, what Captains Lewis and Clark did with their journals. It is what anyone who works with their volumes feels compelled to do. The legacy of the journals is that they continue to be discovered, continue to stir up feelings of wonder and delight, and that they continue to provoke late-night discussions around crackling campfires. I hope these essays live up to that tremendous legacy and that my children and yours have the chance to experience both the pleasingly beautiful and the sublimely grand landscape that is the Lewis and Clark Trail.



i. Experiences of a Writer on the Lewis and Clark Trail

My experiences as a writer on the Lewis and Clark Trail stretch out over all of my adult life and some of my childhood. I've been a teenager cartwheeling my way along the trail; an employee of a tour operation working at the Gates of the Mountains on the Missouri River, where I met and later married my husband; and a young mother trepidatious at her young sons leaning out over the edge of a precipice to get a better view. Now as the mother of nearly grown sons, I find myself searching for ways to make the story of the Corps of Discovery relevant to their lives—to teach them to see beyond the many distractions of youth in the twenty-first century and to appreciate and know about one of the greatest journeys in our country's history.

I remember vividly how the whole crazy idea of following a trail for an entire summer was not the most appealing plan to me as a sixteen-year-old city girl. I know this because my journal from that summer is a

chronicle of my evolution from a whiny, self-absorbed teenager to an off-road traveler coming to love the gypsy life and to appreciate the rigors of hiking, canoeing, and camping. My journal is filled with the kind of memorabilia you would expect: poems, song lyrics, snapshots, and even newspaper clippings of my favorite star of that year's Summer Olympics. The cover of it has drawings, doodles, and a fortune from Bazooka bubble-gum that Lewis and Clark might have appreciated: "Become a mountain climber and you will reach your peak." Although my journal covers only one summer, the trail is very much a part of my present. It remains familiar and all around me. I am lucky to be friends with many of the folks who tell its story and who keep it alive in the minds of young people.

On Kings Hill in central Montana we faced our own version of the sinking of the iron boat when our Chevy truck broke down. First I should explain that from infancy my siblings and I were raised to have an unwavering faith in the Chevy pickup truck. Much like Jefferson and Lewis trusted the technology and the ingenuity of their iron boat, we ranked Chevys right up there with Mom and Dwight Eisenhower for reliability. So when the beloved Chevy truck broke down, our reaction ranged from disbelief to a refusal to witness its being towed away to the nearest dealer. I recorded on that day that we met the ranger Buzz Adolphson, of Monarch, Montana, friendly, bearded, and sporting a handle-bar moustache, who also happened to be a Lewis and Clark fan and liked the idea of a family following the trail. He hosted us at his cabin for dinner that night and regaled us with stories of what it was like to be a Montana ranger. I told him someday my journal might be published, and he teased me that it would be a bestseller only if I did not put my picture on the cover. Twenty-three years later, I stuck a newspaper clipping alongside that day's

entry: a picture of Buzz, still bearded but a bit greyer, patiently “modernizing” the campground on King’s Hill.

The Missouri River Breaks National Monument paddle is an adventure that is never the same twice. A most memorable trip was in 1993 with Larry and Bonnie Cook on their boat the *West Wind*. On that particular trip we also had our canoes, but if the wind came up the plan was that we could all ride on their motorized boat and haul the canoes behind. It was a great plan except for one hitch: Bonnie did not want dogs on the barge, and if you have ever been on the Missouri River with Bonnie Cook you know you do not want to rock her boat. We made the mistake of bringing two dogs with us, our old golden retriever, Curly, and our toy poodle named Stanzie. That meant someone had to paddle the dogs in the canoes to the pull-off we had settled on that morning. I will never forget the extreme sense of embarrassment my husband, John, and I felt as we paddled hard and long, eventually past some local fishermen on the bank who exclaimed, “There is a goddamned poodle in that canoe!” Bonnie finally came around, though: she got quite a kick out of the golden retriever swimming out to catch some leftover spaghetti noodles she had thrown overboard. I know I had her laughing when later I sent her a Christmas card that read, “Citizens for a poodle-free Montana.” If you write about Lewis and Clark it is mandatory to include at least one good dog story.

As an aside I would like to thank our dear friend Dayton Duncan for making Curly a minor celebrity in Lewis and Clark circles. Dayton described Curly’s ascent to the Hole in the Wall and the Needle’s Eye in his book *Out West*. Curly is also remembered for throwing up in a canoe as it went over Roundup Rapids on the Big Blackfoot River, but that is another story. According to Dayton, Curly was the first retriever ever to have visited the two landmarks on the same day, an achievement that was not

without some protest on the dog's part. I do not know if Dayton can verify that fact, but it sounds likely to me.

Another experience with outfitters came on the Lolo Trail with Harlan and Barb Opdahl. When I was a teenager hiking the Lolo, I always wished we could have done it on horses. Years later, in 1993, when we actually did it on horses, I was surprised to find myself on the second or third day opting to ride in the truck rather than saddling up. Covering the rugged Bitterroot Mountains, the Lolo Trail is intersected with logging roads or, rather, with one-lane dirt roads that have rock on one side and sheer dropoffs on the other. I was with Barb when she had to back her truck, overflowing with gear, down such a road and basically refused to do it. Harlan had to get in and take the wheel. It was the one time I saw him get mad. But I don't blame Barb; I'd rather face an angry husband than back down a logging road any day. Harlan always had a soft spot for my boys, though. He gave them their choice of mounts and told me, as he watched my face go pale, that I had no cause for worry. Mind you they were aged three and six and were in no way experienced riders. I will never forget him carrying my tuckered-out three-year-old, Riley, as Harlan rode his trusty horse Kid with Riley sleeping peacefully in his arms. We have met many special people along the trail, and Larry, Bonnie, Harlan, and Barb rank right up there at the top.

We have also had our share of "greenhorn" experiences. I remember a particular student who came with us one summer on the Lolo Trail. The instructions were to bring quantities of rice, beans, and other easily packed foods they could transport in the car and later bag up for backpacking. Instead of downsizing his supplies, one student packed a ten-pound bag of rice over the trail. When he realized he made a mistake, he thought he could avoid ridicule by putting a small hole in the rice bag about half-way up. He left a trail of rice kernels all the rest of the way. It reminded me of Hansel and Gretel.

Another time a young city slicker and his female friend came with us over Lemhi Pass. Their little Toyota had a hard time in the “gumbo,” also known as Montana mud, and they basically made their way sideways up to the top of the pass. When they finally came into camp they were surprised to find that at Lemhi, everyone needed to haul in their own water. They hadn’t thought of that. To make matters worse they forgot to pack coats and later lost their keys. They also nearly drowned at the Three Forks after we broke the rule about putting two inexperienced flatlanders in the same canoe. They remained in good spirits, though, and recall the trip fondly to this day.

A few summers ago I was on the river again, near the breaks, this time with forty-five or so youth range campers (rural kids aged twelve to sixteen) in the hundred-degree heat with thirty canoes and only a few campers who knew how to paddle. At one point our canoes were stretched out on the river for at least a mile and a half. The nature walks and readings the camp counselors had scheduled, and which I was to participate in, were hard, if not impossible, to undertake. Not only was it one hundred degrees, but the mosquitoes were very troublesome to say the least. At one point I had to sit in the canoe and read to them about Lewis and Clark as the campers sat in the river to avoid heat exhaustion. A truck stopped on the other side of the river to wonder at the sight. The people in it probably thought we were performing some kind of religious ritual, which in a way we were.

So what is it about the Lewis and Clark Trail that affected my writing? I learned to be observant and to note the extremes—the quirky details—and to hold on to and record the humorous episodes by keeping a daily journal, which though surely subjective is more reliable than my faulty memory. I learned to record the friendships and the characters large and small. I learned that you have to “walk the walk” if you are going to “talk the talk”: that nothing can substitute for experiencing the trail for yourself.

I learned that the story of Lewis and Clark is also the story of friendship, helpfulness, proceeding on, and finally reaching the moment of “Ocian in View. O the Joy!”

I have many other stories. I am likely one of the few people who can say she got married on the Lewis and Clark Trail. I once hiked on the Lolo Trail in bare feet because my hiking boots, or “waffle stompers” as we called them, were giving me blisters. I have cooked and eaten boudin blanc, and I do not recommend it. I have explored the Judith River and come to appreciate why Clark named it in honor of the one he loved. Each summer my sons jump into the Missouri River from a thirty-foot cliff at the Gates of the Mountains, just for the fun of it, and of course to scare their mother to death. It has been twenty-eight years since my first experience as a writer on the Lewis and Clark Trail, and I can honestly say that it never gets old for me. The trail, like the river, is very much a living thing. It offers us a way to connect to the past, present, and future. I have always thought that when I reach my paddle forward and pull, the river and I are singing to each other in a language unspoken but which sings, “Just keep rolling along.”