

WRITING LIKE OUR WORLD DEPENDS ON IT

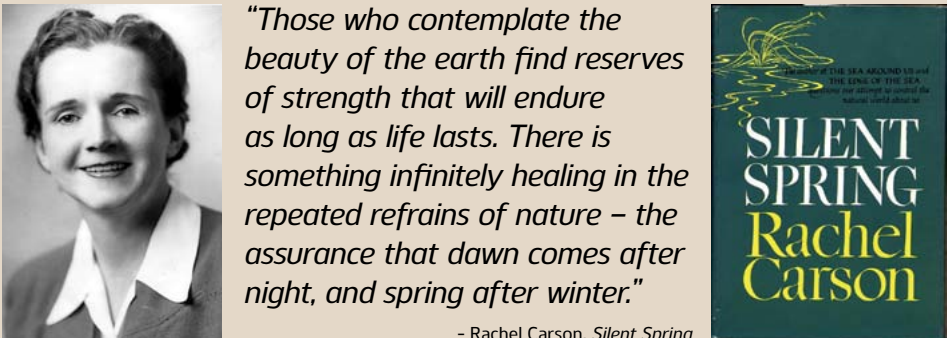
By Bob Baron and Patty Maher

Not only is writing a creative way to commune with nature, it is also a way to reach out to others, to instill in them the appreciation and love for wild and natural places – because once they love it, they will work to protect it. Now our world is at a crossroads where these wild and natural places (and us) will be lost, if left unprotected.

REFLECT AND SEEK

We live in a time of increasing noise – cell phones, music, chatter, street sounds. Teenagers and business people are plugged in at all times, as if they are afraid of quiet, of being by themselves, of personal reflection. We may live in a world of increasing speed, with little time for relaxation or tranquility. Yet without time for contemplation, a person is nothing more than an object that reacts to external stimulation. For some, being alone and quiet is frightening. For others, silence and solitude allow one to contemplate and grow, to seek deeper meaning. We need silence in order to hear.

We humans have been living in nature for a million years. That DNA is still in us. Mankind has been in cities for perhaps just ten thousand years and in large cities for even less; a few



"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature – the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter."

– Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

centuries. So, in going outside to a small park or a wilderness area, we are, in a sense, going home.

For the last seven hundred years, writing has been the principal method of communicating to others our experiences, science and ideas. In some cases, we write for ourselves – in a journal, or to reach out to young people and awaken them to the excitement and miracle of the outdoors, to share with older people the science and peace of nature or to influence political and business leaders to address the issues of clean air, clean water, global warming and the establishment of green places, national parks and wilderness areas.

Environmental issues are not restricted locally. Pollution and weather modification can, and do, spread around the world. Global warming will affect everyone. We all need clean air and clean water. Writers and photographers can communicate problems and solutions to a larger audience through the power of their words and the beauty and strength of their images.

THE POWER OF THE WRITTEN WORD

The world population has been steadily growing. In 1800, there were one billion people. By 1900, the population rose to 1.6 billion and in 2000, it leapt to 6.12 billion. Today there are nearly eight billion people on our planet and that number is increasing. Because of the growth in population and modern technology, we are stressing our life systems – damaging our air, our water and our climate.

This is a challenging time for those of us who care about the land. In the United States, the current national government is attacking many laws and regulations put into place to protect our environment by U.S. presidents, starting in 1901 with Teddy Roosevelt and supported by both political parties over the last century.

Climate deniers are not looking out for the future generations who will follow. But through writing and powerful images, we can educate and win hearts and minds, and make a difference.

The wilderness makes you humble. While you are in the wilderness, you realise how small you are and how much you have to learn and share. The Earth has been around for billions of years while we are each here for less than a century – a blink of an eye by comparison. We are one of many on a small planet in a very minor part of the universe. Mother Nature continues to show us who is in charge with earthquakes, tsunamis, heavy rain, snow, drought, floods, fires, tornadoes, and other manifestations of things beyond our control.

NATURE WRITING

What is special about wilderness? How does a wild place change us? It is, first of all, a place to get away from the commotion of modern life, and be with one's self; a place to feel, think and belong, to listen to one's heart. Each of us should live our own lives, reach our own conclusions, and find our own purpose and meaning.

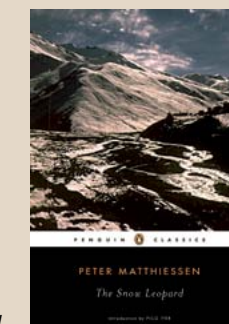
Reading the book of nature can lead to understanding and peace. Life is all around us and springs from the earth. By looking up, we can see the changing skies, the clouds and stars, migratory birds heading south for the winter, the turning of the earth. Early people looked at the stars and planets and discovered the seasons, the movements of the stars across the sky. They told stories about the lights in the night sky. Day turns into night and vice versa while the seasons advance in a never-ending sequence.

For some, wilderness, not civilisation, is the path to self-knowledge. What is it in being away from people that allows us to discover ourselves? What is it about the wilderness that leads us to spiritual awareness, to peace and understanding, to wisdom, to self-renewal? Many people have gotten closer to God and themselves in the wilderness, away from cities and turning to nature, looking inside their souls, far from the crowds, witnessing God's handiwork. In the *Bible*, the wilderness was a place of spiritual renewal. The Jews fled to the desert for renewal and purification. Moses went into the wilderness, as did John the Baptist, Jesus and Mohammed before starting their missions.



"The sun is roaring, it fills to bursting each crystal of snow. These rocks and mountains, all this matter, the snow itself, the air – the earth is ringing. All is moving, full of power, full of light."

– Peter Matthiessen, *The Snow Leopard*



As Henry David Thoreau wrote: "Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest. Not yet subdued by man, its presence refreshes him."

In examining nature and meaning, we should be poets as well as scientists, humble and inquisitive, someone small and yet significant. We should walk lightly on the Earth. Like all things we love, we should protect the wilderness. We need to share the stillness of eternal beginning and look at distances, both inward and outward.

Much of modern life leads away from contemplation and understanding. But we need contemplation, a time when we are not reacting to life's little things. We need time to think, understand and create.

Major societies all hold that creativity is central to human life and essential to survival. There are prehistoric paintings and carvings created thousands of years ago in the caves of Lascaux, Altamira and Kappa. Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Mozart, Shakespeare and countless others show us human creativity. All that we know of the infinity of time and space as well as the infinitesimal, was theorised and discovered by human beings. In writing a symphony or poetry, in painting a portrait or the Sistine Chapel, an individual has reached for a greater world. There are human beings who have looked into the universe and discovered galaxies, or into the microscope and discovered new worlds, or contemplated and wrote new theories of the universe. Mankind is an animal that reasons, that dreams, that creates.

We came from the Earth and we will return to it. Earth to Earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes. We came from an almost infinite past, and the atoms in our body will continue into an almost infinite future. While we are here, we must use our reason, our potential, our senses, and our creativity. That is what it means to be human.

Man is part of nature and nature is part of us. To discover what part of nature is part of us is to discover what it is to be alive, to discover our own humanity and history. Open your eyes and share a child's sense of wonder at God's creation.

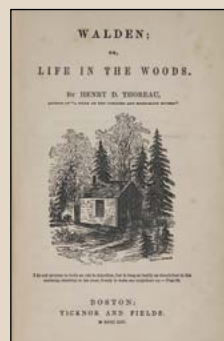
One goal of life involves living in harmony with nature, preserving areas of peace, those special places each of us has. The wilderness is not a place for us to run away and hide. It is a place of self-discovery, of unity, of spiritual awareness, of becoming deeper and stronger before returning to the crowd to act on our beliefs. There is a spiritual connection between human beings and the land. For many, this special relationship to the land defines who we are, how we act, and how we relate to our God.

Writing is timeless; you can reach out to others, sometime separated from you by distance or decades. There are people who have books in their library that were written hundreds of years ago and yet, when reading them, it is as if they were written for their eyes only.

As a writer, write about what you know and love. Share your love of nature through your writing. Our world depends upon it. 🐾



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"We need the tonic of wildness... At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be indefinitely wild. We can never have enough of nature."

– Henry D. Thoreau, *Life in the Woods*

