



SYNDICATE PACKET

earth muffin memos

MOLLY MURFEE
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Dear Editor,

The ***Earth Muffin Memos*** column is a creative break from the overstimulation of our too much world. It adds a refreshing, engaging and activating voice to the fray, with a solutions-based approach towards positive change. It encourages all of us to become motivated culture-shifters towards a paradigm that is earth-honoring, diversity-inclusive and community-building.

Earth Muffin Memos topics include the environment; connecting to nature; disconnecting from technology; mountain and outdoor culture; sustainability; stewardship; community; modern culture; equality; humanitarian endeavors; communication; and beyond.

A variety of readers will connect with ***Earth Muffin Memos***. Written from a high mountain community, those who live in or close to the mountains will immediately identify, as will inhabitants of other communities dominated by nature – from the desert to the oceans – and their ensuing outdoor lifestyles.

Yet citizens of other communities will also be drawn to ***Earth Muffin Memos*** for its alternative take on current and timeliness topics, offering a worthwhile viewpoint from the outskirts of more “civilized” society. Armchair travelers and the curious will be entertained and challenged by opinions and stories that might be outside of their common routine.

Anyone who feels we desperately need to improve our relationships to the environment, community, ourselves and each other will definitively not want to miss a single column.

The time is now for such a voice.

Please consider featuring ***Earth Muffin Memos*** as a regularly syndicated column in your publication.

Enclosed in this packet is more information on ***Earth Muffin Memos***, myself as the author, sample articles, and an order form to establish our professional relationship.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Molly Murfee
Author, ***Earth Muffin Memos***

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**Thought-provoking prose of the wild and human,
seated in the sublime, seasoned with irreverence.**

ABOUT EARTH MUFFIN MEMOS

With thought-provoking, inspiring and informative creative essays, Earth Muffin Memos motivates readers to instigate positive environmental, social and cultural change on our planet. Articles offer an alternative perspective and commentary on both current and timeless topics involving our environment; connecting to nature; disconnecting from technology; mountain and outdoor culture; sustainability; stewardship; community; modern culture; equality; humanitarian endeavors; communication; and beyond.

ABOUT MOLLY MURFEE

Molly Murfee is an award-winning creative non-fiction and place-based author. Her favorite muse is wilderness and its inherent metaphor, especially as it winds through the passion and tenacity of mountain people living in the rhythms of their untamed home. She believes writing is a powerful vehicle for change - educating and motivating towards the preservation of our wild places and the assurance of human rights. Molly is a devoted op-ed columnist in her home community in the Southern Rocky Mountains, freelance writer, field educator and wilderness guide. She holds Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees in literature, specializing in creative, nature and environmental writing with over 400 (and counting) nationally, regionally and locally published articles and a book project in process.

TOPICS INCLUDE (BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO):

- Environment
- Communication
- Community
- Connection
- Culture
- Diversity
- Feminism
- Nature
- Outdoor Adventure
- Slowing Down
- Stewardship
- Sustainability

COLUMN SYNDICATION STATS

- 750 – 1,000 words
- Bi-weekly or monthly
- \$50 per column
- One-time, non-exclusive rights offered
- Auto payments
- Columns sent in a Word document or in the body of an email
- Custom orders can be made concerning word count, frequency, price and publication rights.

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*Price per column is \$50
unless otherwise negotiated.
Please call Molly to discuss
any special terms.*

COLUMN ORDER FORM

CONTACT INFORMATION

name of publication	phone	fax
website	mailing address	
contact person's name	position	
email	phone	

PUBLICATION DETAILS

start date	deadline for each submission	publication day each week
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Typical word count ranges from 750 – 1,000 words. Please list above if you have a more specific word count need

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COMMENTS

ORDER FORM MAY BE SENT VIA:

SCANNED & EMAILED: molly@mollymurfee.com

FAX: 970-349-0947 ONLINE: mollymurfee.com/syndicated-column

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THE SLOW ART OF THE SAUNTER

We are always going somewhere. The top of the peak, the end of the ride. The next meeting, the next assignment. We are constantly doing, achieving, striving. Always with some goal in mind – even if it is recreational.

We forget. To just. Be.

There's a lot we miss in not just being.

I've formed a habit that contributes vastly to the tiny tendrils of sanity I cling to. Every morning I make my tea, don whatever gear the early temperatures demand, and go on a saunter. Most days it is exactly the same saunter, on a trail popular for walking dogs, chatting with friends, going on a jog, or that quick pre-work mountain bike ride.

I walk extremely slowly and admit to an amount of self-consciousness in doing so. I don't have a dog to blame it on, or a child tottering after me, and so when hearing footsteps or tire treads approach, nonchalantly pull off the trail and pretend to look at something – a Yellow Warbler flitting in the willows, the newly unfurled banners of the cheer-drenched Mule's Ear Sunflower.

It is amazing to notice what exists in the world when you're not moving so fast, not doing several things at once in the interest of efficiency and lack of time.

So often we whizz by, pedaling like the boogeyman is chasing us, that it is hard to notice. It is hard to notice the tiny bird's nest in the one pine tree in that otherwise aspen-saturated forest, or the tiny olive-colored bird with the red crest like a mohawk that frequents it, or that the nest was somehow gone the following year.

It's hard to hear the heralders of spring – the Red-Winged Black Birds on first arrival, the buzzy trill of the first Broad-Tailed Hummingbird, that heart-throbbing first Robin's call – when on a cell phone making a string of appointments for later that day.

It's hard to catch the green glint of that first blade of grass when engrossed in a conversation inducing visions of the people you're mad at.

When we hurry so much we put our bodies in a constant state of stress. Evolutionarily this stress charged

our adrenaline so we could run from the saber-toothed tiger and other threats. But then, we outwitted the tiger and the chase was over. Tigers didn't chase us every waking hour. We rested afterwards.

In our modern world we subject our bodies to the equivalent of constantly running from that saber-toothed tiger due to a barrage of irrelevant stresses, over-burdened to-do lists and inconsequential worries that aren't really life threatening, but our brain stem tells us are because it has not evolved quickly enough to distinguish a tiger from a demanding text that really could be put on hold for another 30 minutes until we are done with our saunter.

Our heart-rate, however surges the same. As does our adrenaline and its companion cortisol. And we're feeding the very thing we came to get away from. The physiology and chemistry of what's supposed to be a life-saving reaction, in fact has become a source of our emotional and physical demise on a variety of levels.

In the scenario at hand, the one of being on a walk in the woods, when we are constantly on our cell phones, constantly talking, constantly trying to get the ride or the run or the walk over with so we can move on to the next thing, we are missing the point of being out there in the first place. We are missing the golden opportunity of being in the present – that present with the air sweetly perfumed with the newly bloomed wild peas, the way the sun glowingly filters through the aspen leaves creating intricate patterns of shadow and light, the Great Blue Heron on her morning ritual fly to that high alpine lake abundant with fish.

I am one that believes nature serves as a great tonic for our overworked, over-busy lives – but only if we intentionally create the time and space to listen and notice. To let the effervescent green of a new aspen leaf really sink into our pores. To evaporate the hardened surface of our own skin until it dissipates into sunlight. To become one with where we are.

When we put everything else down and engage in the simple act of just noticing we gain the perspective of

what's actually important. We orient towards something larger than ourselves. The microbes in the soil, the electromagnetic pulses of the earth, the vitamin D of the sunshine, all contribute to our health – making us calmer. Happier. We stop the constant shots of cortisol into our overtaxed bloodstream and allow our bodies to reset. In this state we are better to the people around us – the person taking too much time in the grocery store line. Our friends. Children. Spouses. Ourselves.

We find, through the joy of discovering the squawks of the Great Blue Heron babies as they receive the newly caught fish from their parents, that it really doesn't take so much to make us happy. Why all this running and fretting

and worrying? We gain self-awareness – realizing we had hunched our shoulders up around our earlobes in response to the constant stimulus.

We notice how utterly manic and ridiculous we have become, having lost touch with the world hovering on the edges of our bodies, so addicted we are to our gadgets and screens and the never-ending search to be getting somewhere else.

There is a magic and a beauty that comes from the “just being” of a slow saunter. All that to do. All those angers and frustrations and stresses ...

They fall away until we are left with the absolute absorption into simply what is.

ARTICLE SAMPLE

WHY NO, VIRGINIA, I DON'T HAVE A CELL PHONE

It crops up often when people are introducing me to someone – “Molly doesn't have a cell phone!” they exclaim, as if proclaiming a curiosity not unlike some exotic animal at the zoo.

The ensuing reactions are mixed. “You don't?” some wonder dreamy-eyed at me, followed by a trailing “I wish I could do that ...” pang of jealousy.

Others are more shocked, “How do you live?” they amuse with a look as if someone just jammed a hard-heeled cowboy boot into their toe. You can see the mental scroll through scenarios where a cell phone mandates itself in their lives.

Some are just flat out pissed, I presume from a resentment arising in that I have figured out how to side-step a current cultural norm that makes them feel understandably tethered. “I can't be your friend because you don't text,” one such person told me. Good riddance.

I admit to my ease in avoiding the ubiquitous cell phone. I live in the drop-dead center of my tiny town. If I step onto the main street for a half minute I most likely see the person for whom I am looking (often my partner Mark, who has a strong wandering gene, and also does not have a cell phone).

Working from home, I am there most all the day, and can answer my land line (I'm even in the phone book) as easily as the now-chunky hand-held computers wearing marks in jeans and bras. I don't have kids, so don't have to coordinate playdates or after school activities. I have a small digital camera and a wee iPod, applications not tied to a communication device.

It's a funny thing, not participating in a modern norm. While everyone else drinks the Kool-Aid, you're an outside observer to a cultural phenomenon, frighteningly watching the rest of the world go mad.

In the winter, Mark and I ride among busloads of people all being careened from the Town to the Mountain, through a valley miraculously holding such nomenclature as “Paradise Divide,” everyone looking down at that eerie glow, all presumably connecting with someone else through that flat, intangible screen rather than the smiles of friends, neighbors and strangers right in front of them all going out to do something we collectively love. They miss the rosy light on the peaks, the marvel of the sheer majesty of those mountains. Many times, we'll be the only ones looking out the window, or at each other. It's a strange, strange spectacle to witness.

In these moments, we arrive in some twilight zone place, uncomfortable with just sitting, looking at each other, or having empty space in which we have to do nothing. We get fidgety with the stillness of the present. So we pick up the phone, and scroll.

The cell phone trains us we must constantly be doing something, getting in touch with someone somewhere else rather than just being where we are. It makes us important, validating our busy existence, if we're needed by that buzz or ring, like a junkie mouse ordained to keep pouncing on the magical button for some kind of reward.

Through the cell phone we tell others someone else in our lives is more valuable. I've watched whole families or groups of friends flip through facebook around a dining table, rather than speak to each other about the trials and wonders of their day.

In our own community, people living a block away from each other, scream or agree about some perceived problem over a screen, rather than talking about it over a cup of tea or a mug of beer where facial expression and body language are part of the more humanizing conversation. Behind the cell phone, and on social media, a bizarre sense of anonymity exists, giving permission to blurt whatever unkindness pops into our fickle brains.

With the cell phone we are obscenely hitched to responsibility, to being available at any given moment. We have lost our freedom in the process, interrupting our days off, after hours and vacation time with work and obligation. We have no time to truly unplug, allowing our bodies and minds to rejuvenate. We no longer have the yawning and open sensation the day is our own to do with it what we will. The ball and chain of knowing that someone could call you at any minute, charging you to duty, is always a click away. "You don't have to respond," is always the retort. But

inevitably we do, just this one time, until our single day of freedom has vanquished into one of burdensome tasks.

There was a time when running into someone at a concert, party, restaurant or on the street was a testament to universal synchronicity and serendipity. We were supposed to find each other! Now with the cell phone there is no space for that wondrous spontaneity. Everything is planned and coordinated. Siri tells us how to get there. Some of the adventure of life is removed.

We are losing our connection to each other, rather than gaining it, and are certainly losing contact with the natural world. As my sister declares, "The cell phone will cause the demise of civilization," the lack of connection to everything around us creating a poisonous stew of anxiety, false expectations, nasty communications, and exacerbated sense of need. We bumble around with our heads down, rather than looking life straight in the eye. We could be aware of the beauty and diversity at our fingertips if only they weren't busy swiping a screen.

And so no, Virginia, I don't have a cell phone. Because in so doing I am making my own small yet adamant protest to this overwrought, overtaxed, overworked society that I choose connection rather than convenience, freedom rather than task-driven obligation, and that the world I live in is actually one that is breathing.

ARTICLE SAMPLE

DUCT TAPE N DIRT

There is a particular caricature of a particular type of mountain town dweller that involves large smatterings of duct tape and generous heapings of scruffiness brought on (predominately) by an intimacy with dirt.

Duct tape is a compact toolbox to anyone who has ever called their truck or tent home, or spent a good part of their “adult” life not taking daily showers, as demanded by the more proper, constantly-preening society. Duct tape patches tree branch rips in your puffy, thermarest burn holes from the campfire, puts back together coffee mugs. It is an underground cultural icon with deep subversive roots.

And dirt – how can we not love dirt? Our food comes from it, after all, and it is the very substrate upon which we live and thrive. Edward Abbey constantly bellowed for us to strike out into the wild to get bitten, bloody, scratched, sunburned and dirty. There is a war on dirt lately – large to small – from the appalling shrinkage of our national monuments, to rampant overdevelopment, to paving projects’ lava-like creep onto any surface that is porous or green.

Recently there was a campaign against dirt on my alley. Too many puddles, too much dust, too little care, not enough parking (nor creativity, apparently). I fought it. Because with pavement come straight lines, an antiseptic overlay of what used to be rough, irregular, unique. “Why not?” newcomers ask. This is how “civilized society” lives. Plaster over that which is real, anything not fabricated by man, the living, uncontrollable (and therefore scary). Dirt gets under your fingernails. There’s probably bugs in it. Surely this earth could be more useful, if we could just modify it.

Mountain culture conversely holds a crusty and suspicious raised eyebrow to the “shiny,” the straight-edged and the strait-laced. This fear of duct tape and dirt insidiously creeps, infiltrating mountain town culture, causing its slow eating demise. So naturally it propels us to be defensive, territorial.

Truly, there are lessons to be learned here, in the maintenance of duct tape and dirt, little somethings these seemingly simple habits stand to teach us. Indeed, in these subtle actions lies a value system outside of what other societies purport as the “norm.”

Practically, “ducking” rather than replacing is originally due predominately to the lack of money to purchase a new item. The more relevant, yet subtle, undercurrent of decisions, however, are made without statement or any degree of pomp, as natural as snow in winter.

There is not time to constantly be taking showers, for example, if you’re constantly running up mountains in between jobs and dishes. Money is better spent on adventure and experiences of beauty than a new jacket if a little patchwork will do. It is better to have a lower paying job that allows you time to roam and connect with the deep, dank earth. Listen to her breathe.

It is the radical assumption that things can be fixed, rather than thrown away. That having the “latest” shouldn’t be the highest priority. Make it work until it absolutely falls apart, then use it for something else. This is the same mentality of the cobbler, the small machine repairman, the grandmother darning socks. A little less skill, yes, but the same foundational philosophy of the modern-day “reduce and reuse.” Stuff is expensive, after all, especially when considering the real planetary costs of shipping and manufacturing in a global economy.

Duct tape and dirt say “no” to excessive materialism so there is time and money to say “yes” to what is truly valuable and important. It is a “less stuff” way of life, rather than a throw-away culture based on constantly updated things. It flies in the face of our commercialism and capitalism on steroids – “buy, buy, buy” at the expense of, well, everything else.

What I want to encourage is comfort with dirt and getting dirty. An ease with imperfection. A craving of the rough, cracked edges that sculpt the lines of character. An embracement of the slightly off-kilter. I want more of a focus on diving deep into beauty, rather than the short-sighted gluing of our noses into online catalogues of stuff. To preserve rather than to pave and polish. To honor the concept that something can’t be improved, it is imperfectly perfect, accepted, loved and cherished just as it is. To chaotically, fantastically and wildly thrive, rather than disintegrate into a gray substance no more interesting than pocket lint, destroying the planet in our wake.