

Journaling: Opportunities for Self Care

What is the source of our first suffering?

It lies in the fact that we hesitated to speak.

It was born in the moment

When we accumulated silent things within us.

- Gaston Bachelard

Writing is an act of faith: faith that what I have to say, how I see the world, are important. I listen. I see. I feel and I record. – Georgia Heard

We have to accept ourselves in order to write. Now none of us does that fully; few us do it even halfway. Don't wait for one hundred percent acceptance of yourself before you write, or even eight percent acceptance. Just write. The process of writing is an activity that teaches us about acceptance.

- Natalie Goldberg, *Wild Mind*

Had I been blessed with even limited access to my own mind there would have been no reason to write. I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear.

– Joan Didion

It seems to me that writing is a marvelous way of making sense of one's life, both for the writer and for the reader.

– John Cheever

The world is impatient it tells you, You should be over that by now. The page does not judge how long it takes. The page can hold your sorrow and will not rush you on.

- Henriette Anne Klauser, *With Pen in Hand*

What is healing but a shift of perspective?

- Mark Doty

The way we tell our life story is the way we begin to live our life.

- Maureen Murdock

The value of this writing in brief:

- Anyone can do it. (Forget your high school English class and don't compare yourself to professional writers)
- It can be done anywhere.
- It can be done at any time.
- It doesn't take a big time commitment.
- It's inexpensive, cheaper than a therapist

It's an opportunity for self care and self understanding.

- It's something you do for yourself. It helps you to be with yourself—your thoughts and feelings.
- Writing helps you make sense of your life and allows you to gain perspective on your experience. By writing, you figure out what you think and feel.
- Writing encourages you to go deeper. It helps you tap into inner wisdom. The best answers are often the ones you discover for yourself.
- It provides a safe, accepting space to express things that may feel too hard to speak.
- The page listens in an uninterrupted, nonjudgmental way and keeps your confidence. It doesn't tell you unwanted advice or get tired of listening.

It invites self expression.

- Writing helps you claim your own voice and asserts the importance of that voice. It helps you practice speaking up for yourself.
- Writing allows you to express what is true for you, without fear of interruption or concern for a listener's reaction. I also think it's harder to lie in writing than with spoken words.
- By clarifying your thoughts and feelings in writing, you can then explain things more clearly to others.
- Writing helps you figure out what's really going on before you speak unconsidered and raw emotions to someone else.
- It invites you to think about things and say things that you might not otherwise find the opportunity to say.

It can make you feel better.

- Writing offers an outlet for stress, allowing you to vent and express your feelings.
- Writing “puts earth back under your feet.” It can be an anchor when your world feels like it’s shifting.
- Writing is meditative and calming. It can become a comforting, a familiar habit.
- Writing takes the vague worries and upsets in your head and makes them concrete, so you can look at them. It brings the hidden and confused into the light. When you bring things to light, they become less shameful and paralyzing. It’s what we hide that has the most power to shame us.
- It can help you process grief and gives you an opportunity to address unfinished emotional business.
- Writing can be healing. It can relieve a burden. It can help you let things go that consume energy.

It helps you problem solve.

- Writing is a tool to help you make decisions, find solutions, and gain resolve when you need it.
- Writing helps crystallize what you know. It helps you get at the core of a problem, which facilitates finding a solution.
- The page can hold your wishes, dreams, and intentions, and writing these things down can motivate change.
- Unlike spoken words, which are lost in the air, writing creates a record of your experiences and state of mind. You can then look back on them to measure your growth and to identify any patterns.
- Writing creates a record of important aspects of who we are and how we’ve lived that can provide an invaluable legacy for loved ones. It becomes a voice that can speak across the years.

Forms that this writing can take:

- Journal entry
- Freewriting
- Letter
- List
- Moment/Snapshot
- Stories
- Memoir
- Poem

Advice:

- Start small.
- Write for a manageable period of time.
- Tell your critical voice to be quiet. This is not your high school English class.
- Allow yourself to be honest. Tell yourself that no is going to read what you write. And, of course, no one has to.
- Write to discover. Go where the writing leads you. Allow for surprises.

Try this:

- Write before bed to process the day. Get your concerns out on paper to help you sleep better.
- Write nonstop for five minutes, getting out whatever comes. Then reread what you wrote and find a line that particularly strikes you. Rewrite this chosen line at the top of a new page and write another five minutes exploring your new focus.
- Sit quietly for a moment and scan your body. Notice any tightness or unease in your body. If you find it, write my _____ (chest, stomach, throat, jaw . . .) feels tight because . . . And keep writing to discover what your body is telling you.
- Writing Prompts:
 - “One thing that is true for me today is . . .”
 - “Something that would make me feel better is . . .”
 - “Here are ways that I can care for myself today . . .”
 - “What I really want others to know about my experience is . . .”
 - “What I’ve learned as a caregiver is . . .”
 - “What I know about myself *now* that I didn’t know before I became a caregiver is . . .”
- In the middle of writing, write “What I really want to say is . . .” and continue. Notice how this invites you to cut to the heart of things.
- Write a letter to the person you are caring for as they were before their brain injury. Are there things you want to tell this person? Is there unfinished business to address?

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