

# Healing THROUGH Writing

by Diana Raab, PhD

I began my writing career at age ten, sitting in my walk-in closet scribbling in my journal. My mother had given me the journal to help me cope with my grandmother's suicide. Thirty years later, those childhood scribbles inspired my first memoir, *Regina's Closet*.

memoir, *Healing with Words: A Writer's Cancer Journey*. While the book began as a recounting of my cancer story, it evolved into a self-help guide for others to chronicle their own cancer journeys.

Not all journals turn into published books, but since I'm a writer, it seemed like a natural path for me. However,

you heal from that trauma. He does have one caveat when it comes to writing for healing, though. He calls it "the flip-out rule." The rule states that if you get too upset when writing, then stop.

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Fast forward ten more years, I began journaling my breast cancer journey. Essentially, I journaled my way to recovery. And those journals became the jumping-off point for my second

you don't have to be a writer to journal. Journals are a productive way to vent about difficult experiences, like facing cancer, for instance. When writing in a journal, it's important to not only write about your experiences but also write how you feel. Writing is an excellent way to get in touch with your feelings.

Journaling is cathartic. It allows you to spill your emotions on the page. My attitude is: "Direct the rage to the page." I have a writing colleague who says, "If it hurts, write harder," and for years those words were posted above my computer until they simply became a part of me.

In the journaling classes I teach, I remind my students that they're not being graded on their journal entries, and they should write whatever comes to their minds. I emphasize that there's no right or wrong way to journal. When you're journaling, you're writing for yourself and no one else.

Dr. James W. Pennebaker, a social psychologist and the author of *Writing to Heal: A Guided Journal for Recovering from Trauma and Emotional Upheaval*, says, "Writing dissolves some of the barriers between you and others. If you write, it's easier to communicate with others." Dr. Pennebaker believes that writing about things like loss, death, abuse, illness, and depression can help



Dr. Diana Raab

Many people find that writing is critical to the healing process. Some people prefer to journal about their experiences, while others may choose to write fiction or poetry as a means of escape. It doesn't really matter how you write. Go with whatever type of writing you find the most liberating and empowering. In the end, that's what it's all about.

*Diana Raab, PhD, is a memoirist, poet, blogger, and speaker who advocates the healing and transformative powers of writing. She's the author of eight books, and her essays and poetry have been widely published. She's a regular blogger for Psychology Today. Her latest book is Writing for Bliss: A Seven Step Plan for Telling Your Story and Transforming Your Life. You can learn more about Dr. Raab at DianaRaab.com, or find her on Facebook at Facebook.com/DianaRaab.Author.*

## Journal Writing Tips

- ❖ Find a quiet, uninterrupted time and place to write.
- ❖ Choose a notebook and writing instrument that inspires you.
- ❖ Use a centering ritual (light a candle, play music, meditate, stretch) at the beginning of your journaling session.
- ❖ Take a deep breath before you begin writing.
- ❖ Set aside your inner critic.
- ❖ Date your journal entries.
- ❖ Start by writing down your feelings and sensations.
- ❖ Write nonstop for 15 to 20 minutes.
- ❖ Save what you've written.
- ❖ Schedule your writing time; put it in your calendar.