



Writing a Memoir as a Healing Process

Writing stories heals body and soul, and is a powerful way to integrate and change our perspective about the past. Feelings long suppressed can be released by writing both painful and happy stories. Research published in the *Journal of the American Medicine Association* in 1999 showed that writing stories is even more healing than journaling, helping to heal asthma, arthritis, and chronic fatigue syndrome.

It's easy to write good memories, but most of us have some not-so-positive memories that we struggle with such as the death of a loved one, child abuse, depression, illness, or natural disasters. Society and our families often remind us to forget the past, but traumatic memories do not go away by will power alone, or even years of therapy. These images and reactions may go underground for a time, only to reappear when triggered. Traumatic memories are stored in the brain in a different way than regular memories. We need to give ourselves permission to re-examine and reprocess these memories as a way to let them go. As we integrate the memories into our regular memory, we move into our present and future renewed and with more energy for our current life.

Writing allows us to integrate different parts of our brain and to establish new pathways. Writing a story differs from journaling. It is a created story with a chosen shape and focus. This structuring and choice regarding what scenes, dialogue, and characters to write about helps create a story and release it onto the page. When you write a memoir you are both the narrator and a "character" in the story. You, the writer, becomes both an active participant and an observer. The narrator who is writing and observing helps us to witness our younger self and find a new perspective from which to see the past and move into our future.

Tips for writing a healing memoir:

1. Make a list of the ten most important turning points in your life.
2. Write a list of the critic voices in your head or the worries you have about writing your stories.
3. Put the worry-critic list aside and begin writing using the turning point list.
4. Write one story after the other in vignette form without worrying about chronological order.
5. Use photos to stimulate your memories. Write what happened before, during, and after each picture.
6. Create a sacred-space around you while you are writing. Do not share your stories with anyone for a while. Protect them as if they were small plants in your garden.
7. Write in the "I" voice in present tense for maximum intensity and immediacy.
8. For more distance, write the story in third person point of view, "he" or "she," and in the past tense, as if the events were happening to another person.

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