

Chapter 9

Narratives of Journal Writing

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ABSTRACT

How can writing help people heal? While writing cannot take the place of an evaluation by a trained medical expert, it can help the healing process. The process of writing serves as a valuable resource whether a patient writes about symptoms in a journal to share with a medical professional, a high school student writes about the day's events in a journal to deal with emotions, or an adult writes a prayer in a journal to cope with uncertainty. Regardless of the circumstances which motivated the writer to pick up a notebook and pen or type at a computer, writing releases thoughts and emotions from the mind to the page. When people transfer ideas to paper, stressful emotional events in the mind and physical tension in the body often improve. Therefore, writing can become a catalyst for healing.

I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW WHO I AM

How can writing help people heal? This question served as the motivation for research and also led to discoveries in my roles as a high school English teacher, Stephen Minister at my church, and health coach. While writing cannot take the place of an evaluation by a trained medical expert, it can help the healing process. When a patient writes about symptoms in a journal to share with a medical professional, a high school student writes about the day's events in a journal to deal with emotions, or an adult writes a prayer in

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a journal to cope with uncertainty, the process of writing serves as a valuable resource. Regardless of the circumstances which motivated the writer to pick up a notebook and pen or type at a computer, writing releases thoughts and emotions from the mind to the page. When people transfer ideas to paper, stressful emotional events in the mind and physical tension in the body often improve. Writing can therefore become a catalyst for healing.

This chapter uses first person and the method of narrative inquiry to share stories and apply artistic methods, such as writing in journals, to the practice of healing. The theory of narrative inquiry invites writers to own their writing voices and make stories accessible. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain, “questions of form for a narrative inquirer are with us from the outset of an inquiry. Even as we tell our own research stories prior to entering into the midst of the field stories, there is a tentative sense of plot. As we engage with research participants and live and tell stories with them, the plotlines under composition are restoried, that is, they are relived and retold. All of these tellings and livings prefigure the narrative forms of our research texts” (p. 165). Narrative inquiry, as a qualitative interpretive form of research, focuses on stories and the finding of narrative threads, or themes, in the stories. Narrative inquiries may include objective data, such as a tally of the number of times events occurred; however, a narrative inquiry also includes subjective data, such as the stories of participants. Consequently, the researcher in the field of narrative inquiry can choose to participate as a participant observer instead of only observing other people. If the researcher chooses the role of a participant observer, attention must be paid to the dual roles. Heifetz (1994) describes the dual roles by using the extended metaphor, “consider the experience of dancing on a dance floor in contrast with standing on a balcony and watching other people dance” (pp. 252-253). Narrative inquirers alternate between the balcony perspective of observation and the dance floor perspective of interacting with participants.

My research into writing as healing began with studying the stories of others during my doctoral dissertation, but expanded when the death of my mom caused me to unexpectedly find myself in the same position as the research subjects I interviewed. My research transformed from just another topic to study to having a larger purpose. My own experiences of how I used writing as healing mean as much to me as the stories of others. The research for this chapter exists as observational research and reflections of previous research projects. It serves as a qualitative interpretive analysis as well as an introduction to writing as healing for anyone looking to explore the concept in their lives.

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