

## The Gifts of Journaling

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Ann Frank journaled and so did comedian Red Skelton, but in different ways. Ann used her journal as a diary, a friend in which she could confide her worst fears and her sacred hopes. The journal did not judge and was available any time she was free to write. Red Skelton, I believe, recorded in his journal every day five facts he learned, five funny experiences and five appreciations. He used his writings to create over 100 characters including Heecliff, the seagull. There are as many ways to journal as there are reasons.

For years I have kept a journal. When in deep therapy mode I have scribbled every sob and angst. As a gift to one of my therapists I photo copied what I had written out verbatim from the audio recordings of over 35 sessions—a journal and half of emotional stuff. I crack it open when it serves me, on average two or three times a week. I have recorded tender conversations from which I want to learn a lesson for myself. Other entries are inspired from watching TV—Oprah Winfrey, Dr Phil McGraw and sometimes the educational channel. I glue in little fact and editorial bits from Time magazine, Psychology Today and the Calgary Herald. It goes to workshops, church services and lectures. Sometimes I use the contents to write an article like this. I operate with a *working* journal. My Joke Journal is separate with jokes that fit my personality and I can tell with some effectiveness.

For about a half a year I followed Julia Cameron's suggestion in her book ***The Artist's Way*** and wrote morning pages every morning if I felt drawn to do so or not. I must say the frustration of writing pages of words when I really didn't want to led to some interesting prose. I also practised Oprah's gratitude journal for nearly a year in concert with my other spontaneous loggings. Recording five gratitudes every night did brighten and lighten my outlook.

### **You may decide to use a journal for the following reasons:**

1. To record your brilliant ideas, words and inspirations. They seem dazzling at the time.
2. To document the progress and stories of your children. Perhaps you will create a separate journal for each child. Some of my greatest stories of Kelly, Ben and Katie are recorded in my journals. Here is one of my favourite family history stories:
3. *One spring day three-year-old Benjamin asked me about what he saw in the garden. I told him it was a crocus which meant spring was here. 15 minutes later I could not find him around the house. I went looking and found him going door to door down our street. When the neighbour opened her door she was faced with a little boy joyously yelling, "News! News! Spring is here!"*
4. To capture key points of lectures, articles and books.
5. To write prose or poetry. Here's one of mine:

*You are so hard on yourself  
Harder than any blackard could be.  
Please be kind to yourself.*

*See yourself as deserving  
A life as equal to the one  
You would so willingly and caringly wish to me.*

6. To collect quotes, jokes or trivia.
7. To record your goals of what you want to do, to have and to be . . . and then to track your progress. Remember the story of the young man who at 16 years of age wrote down the 100 goals he was going to achieve by the time he was 40? He did, including paddling down the Amazon River and making a million bucks. He became famous, but not famous enough for me to remember his name.
8. To serve as a confidant or friend where you can reveal anything.
9. To provide a therapeutic focus for your internal world. Sometimes this is called “pouring your heart out.” To get in touch with feelings you can write, “Today when (event) . . . I felt . . .” Another technique is to write to one part of yourself such as the vulnerable child and then write back to yourself in dialogue. Usually, the non-dominant hand represents the child ego state.
10. To allow words to come through you like **Emmanuel** or Neal Donald Walsh did in ***Conversations with God***.
11. To glue bits of paper and, perhaps love notes. Darn! I wish I hadn't thrown away the dozens of Les' sweet messages from the days of our youthful and romantic glow.
12. To sketch, doodle and give form to creative images.

Journaling is for you and about you. Do you want it to be practical by using a wire ringed notebook or do you want to invest in an exquisite and beautifully bound product? What about your pen—a workhorse or an elegant quill? Do you want to exercise discipline by making an entry every day or do you want to be more spontaneous writing during creative bursts? Do you want a special, perhaps sacred place to write or do you want to record when your life takes interesting turns? Dating your pages provides a useful reference. If it is a private diary consider how you will keep it safely out of others' hands.

Write on! Do it your way! Go for it!

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