

JOURNALING

A Tool to Escape One's Insanity

By G. Raymond McCullough



Don't laugh until you've tried it. Journaling can prove to be very beneficial—even if you aren't an accomplished writer. For many, journaling is commonly known as keeping a diary. You know, the thing your sister (or in some instances your evolved brother) wrote in to capture their journey from preadolescence to adolescence and beyond. God forbid if a guy should ever keep a diary. It would be sacrilegious and an abomination to what it means to be a man. News alert! Many men, including myself, have journaled for years. Quick point, before I continue any further. I used insanity in the subtitle. I use the term to reference someone doing something that is very foolish or unreasonable. My intent is not to offend your sensibilities from the start. However, I do want your attention.

I must admit it wasn't until I entered training to become a counselor 35 years ago that I was introduced to journaling. It was a requirement of our training. We were required to turn journal into our clinical supervisor at the beginning of each training day (Monday through Friday) to our clinical supervisor. The intent, I suspect was to allow the training staff to delve into our inner psyche and to identify psychological blips/quirks that would disqualify someone as a trainee. To this day, I still have

the 4 spiral notebooks we were required to use as our journals. I have an inkling to read them again soon!

Letter writing in many ways is a form of journaling or diary keeping. I was a prolific letter writer when I served in the U.S. Navy. Letters were my lifeline to the world beyond the vast ocean and the grey steel hull of a naval vessel. Letter writing was also a stress reliever. It allowed me to gain some perspective on the many monotonous days at sea filled with loneliness and emotional isolation—despite being in the company of 5,000 other sailors. Because of these circumstances I made it a practice to write a letter everyday—mostly to family and friends to whom I felt connected. In those days onboard ship it would typically take a week to 10 days for a letter to reach its destination. There was an inherent and sometimes disconcerting time gap between what I had written and the response I received several weeks later—a situation rife for miscommunication. Immediate and direct communication was impossible under these circumstances. This was before the days of cell phones and other electronic means of communication. It would be interesting to read the countless letters I wrote over the years to people I cared about. Coincidentally while I was editing this article my 95-year-old mother was rummaging through her possessions and she asked me about a letter I had written her 29 years ago. If I reread some of those letters today I am sure they would clearly reflect my state of mind, mood, and an array of feelings I had at the time. Lastly, as it relates to letter writing, there are many letters I wrote and never mailed. The reason for this was because they were intended for the sole purpose of critical self-reflection and introspection. It works!

Given what I have just shared let me focus on some general guidelines for journaling and/or diary keeping:

1. Establish your goals and objectives for journaling. Is it for gaining greater clarity about your life, as a motivational tool, to identify challenges in your life, spiritual growth, or for identifying strategies to attain a more fulfilling and satisfying life, etc.? Be creative and remain focused.
2. Next, make a commitment to journaling, which first may require appreciating the benefits of keeping a journal.
3. Decide the best time for you to make journal entries. Some people are inspired to make journal entries the first thing in the morning upon waking. Others journal at the end of the day before going to bed. Still, others find that journaling throughout the day works best for them. Experimentation over the course of several weeks may be necessary to identify the time when you are the most vulnerable, reflective, and introspective. Be patient with yourself and allow your process to unfold. Remember to stay committed.
4. From my experience, journaling is the most beneficial when we are feeling vulnerable emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Journaling serves us best when we allow ourselves to be self-reflective and introspective. I speak of vulnerability in the sense of being sensitive to the emotional, physical, and spiritual cues that grab your awareness. Being vulnerable doesn't have to equate to feeling weak or distraught. However, sometimes this may be the case.
5. Finally, be in the **Here and Now**. This is what's now referred to as being Mindful. Just for the sake of clarity, mindfulness is a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly

acknowledging and accepting your feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations.

It is very important that you be aware of your sensations as you experience them in that very moment. For example, if at the end the day find yourself reflecting on an interaction with a co-worker, a call you received from a family member, the drive home, the walk you went after school/work, the meal you had for dinner, or the television show you watched before bedtime. Allow yourself to focus as you reflect on those events. Attempt to push yourself deeper as you try to glean meaning from those sensations. I always encourage people to employ as many of their senses as possible when engaging in this process. The more senses you engage the more complete the picture becomes as you transfer your thoughts, feelings, and sensations into your journal. Allow the sensations to flow freely onto the paper or if you are a techie your device's screen. I personally prefer pen and paper.

There are a number of articles about journaling available through a Google search. One in particular is [33 Journaling Ideas: What to Write About in a Daily Journal](#). As reflected in the title there are a plethora of ideas for what to write in your journal. My intent here was to keep it simple and to share my personal experience with journaling. Journaling, in its many different forms, has been life changing for me-- especially at moments of challenge and when I felt under some duress. I encourage you to give it genuine try and be prepared for enlightenment.

My goal for you in journaling is



and **Change** that enables you to create the life that will bring you a sense of contentment and purpose.