

*- Journal the Journey -
The Working Woman's Guide to Keeping a Journal*



By Deanna Johnson Cauthen

I've always been secretly jealous of people like my husband who had the discipline to keep a journal. Although I've made several attempts, I never had much success. By nature, I'm pretty hyperactive and have difficulty staying in one place for any length of time. Sitting and writing down my thoughts seemed boring and a waste of time.

Going through menopause, however, has changed all of that for me. I think that it's been nature's way of slowing me down. Journaling gives me an opportunity to reflect and record my thoughts and provides a safe place for me to dump some of my emotional baggage. It's been one of the most beneficial things I've done as I journey through the change of life.

How and when I journal depends on what's going on in my life. There are days when I am feeling really nervous and anxious and I write like hell and then there are times when I may only write a brief note. Whatever the case, I can go to my journal and say whatever I feel in the moment without any fear of repercussions. I don't ever have to for saying the wrong thing because there is no wrong thing. It's a great place to go and unload. The funny thing is that when I finish purging, somehow I get a better perspective on my situation and life feels a little bit better.

Keeping a journal is not a new thing. One of the all time great journal keepers was King David in the Bible. The book of Psalms is full of passages venting how he felt at any given moment. You've got to love King David because he it shows that he was a person with real feelings and he expressed a wide range of emotions including:

Distress- *In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears. (Psalm 18:6)*

Despair- *How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? (Psalm 13:1-2)*

Anger- *Contend, LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me (Psalm 35:1)*

Love- *I love you, LORD, my strength. (Psalm 18:1)*

Fear- *Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me (Psalm 55:5)*

Thankfulness- *I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. (Psalm 118:21)*

Relief- *I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears (Psalm 34:4)*

Besides being a safe, cathartic method for dumping your emotional baggage, there are several other good reasons to keep a journal, and I have listed a few of them that you should take into consideration as you make your decision.

1. It allows you to see how much progress you've made in a particular area or goal.

If you have set a goal, having a journal is a great way to track your progress. Whether the goal is for losing weight, becoming more organized or quitting smoking, having a journal can allow you to see how far you've come. Looking back in my journal and seeing my own progress has helped to motivate me to go to the next level of growth.

2. It helps you to keep a record of important events.

In the Old Testament of the Bible, the Israelites marked the times that God delivered them with an 'Ebenezer', a memorial established in remembrance of what God has done for a person or group of people.

Having a journal is a great way to keep a record of your own 'Ebenezers'. It will help you to see how far you've come in your life's journey. It's amazing to me when I look back at my diary to see that I made it through struggles that seemed impossible at the time and it gives me hope and courage for the future.

Reflecting back and remembering my own 'Ebenezers'—homeschooling four children, starting a writing career and returning to the workforce, and having a successful second marriage-- helped me to see that my life has been full of celebrations.

3. It helps you to learn more about yourself.

Taking the time to keep a journal can help you get more in touch with your own emotional state. The act of sitting down and getting quiet and writing can put you in touch with feelings and thoughts you may not even realize you have until you start the writing process. It always amazes me what comes out when I start to journal. Over time you may even start to see a pattern of behavior which could help you identify trouble spots in your life. Identifying these problem areas and dealing with them can lead to greater success in your personal relationships, careers, and other areas of your life.

4. It's a great way to improve your writing skills.

We've all heard the old phrase "Practice makes perfect". Well, it's true. Although journal writing is not a course to be graded, the fact of the matter is, the more you write, the better you'll become.

Now, I know that everybody is not aspiring to become a professional writer, but good writing skills are important in whatever field you work. Writing in a journal, on a regular basis, puts you in the habit of writing and makes it less of a chore. It gives you the opportunity to try new words and expand yourself.

Simple Steps to Help you Succeed at Keeping a Journal

1. Find the writing medium that you are comfortable with.

starting a journal can be as simple as getting a notebook and a pen. If you find that you want to journal on a regular basis, you may want to invest in something nicer. There are a variety of notebooks available. I purchased a very nice leather-bound one for about \$20.00. It's durable and will last a long time.

There are also a variety of websites with journals that you can use if you are comfortable with the internet. One of my favorite websites is *Fitday.com*. It features a free diet and weight loss journal. It keeps track of the foods you eat, how much you exercise, your weight and goals. There is also a place for you to record your thoughts.

2. Relax and release

Writing in your journal should not feel like a chore or a duty. Do whatever you need to do to help yourself relax and get comfortable. Whether it's listening to music or being in a completely quiet room, do what works for you.

Remember that your journal is not an essay paper to be graded by a professor, so don't worry about punctuation or spelling. The focus of your writing should be on processing your emotional issues, not correcting your grammar.

3. Find your perfect place.

Keeping a journal requires some quiet time. It's important to pick a place where you can have a block of time without being disturbed. It may take a little time and experimentation to discover what places work for you so don't be discouraged if your first attempts at finding a place don't work. Also, keep in mind that different spots can work well at different times of the day. For instance, when I journal in the early morning hours, I usually do it in the den area of my house because everyone is asleep and the house is quiet. However, if I decided to write in my journal in the afternoon, I usually take a few minutes and retreat into the solitude of my bedroom because the rest of the house is busy at that time of day.

4. Be flexible with your journaling schedule.

There are days, weeks, and months when I will write in my journal because I really need the release, but then there are periods of time when I may write only a little or nothing at all. It just depends on how I'm feeling. That is the point of keeping a journal in the first place. It's supposed to be there for you when you need it. If you skip a week, month or even a year, it's okay. It's reassuring to know that that you can always come back to it when you need it.

5. Protect your privacy.

In order for you to communicate your feelings openly and honestly, it's important to make sure that your journal is safely secured away from the eyes of others. For me, putting my journal away in my nightstand is enough. The other members of my household know that this is a private place and to keep out. Depending on your situation, you may have to use aggressive measures to secure your privacy, but do whatever it takes.

Other Tips for Keeping a Journal

- Remember, your journal can be whatever you want it to be. If you like to doodle, you might want to get a journal or notebook with unlined pages.
- Use a tape recorder to record your thoughts. It serves as a useful tool to help you remember things that you might want to write down later. Many cell phones have a voice recorder on them which makes it easy to record and keep track of your thoughts and ideas.
- Keep your journal handy because you never know when an epiphany moment will come and you will want to write it down. Lately, I've been using my text messaging and email features on my cell phone to record my random thoughts and ideas. When I think of something important that I want to remember, I send myself a text message or an email. Don't you just love technology!! I don't have to worry about keeping a pad and pen on hand.
- Be very careful about using social networks like *Facebook* and *MySpace* to record the most intimate details of your life. Although these networks have privacy/non-public settings, things still sometimes have a way of getting out. Remember, just because someone is your "friend" on *Facebook* doesn't make them a friend, indeed. Also,

employers are looking more and more at social networks to find out about current employees. Venting and dumping your entire emotional inventory can cause you a lot of embarrassment and can be very costly.

- If you decide to keep a journal on your personal computer, remember to put a password on it so it can be protected. When your journal is on the computer there is always the chance that someone can hack into your computer and read your journal. A password protects it so that others cannot get to it as easily.

Final Reflections

Anne Frank, the famous Jewish Holocaust victim, was given a diary for her 13th birthday. On June 12, 1942, the day that she was given the diary, she wrote, *“I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support.”*

Anne and her family went into hiding several weeks later and to pass the time, she wrote extensive entries in her diary. Some of her writing revealed the despair she felt from the endless days of confinement. *“I’ve reached the point where I hardly care whether I live or die,”* she wrote on February 3, 1944.

But writing in her diary also provided Frank with relief and release and helped her to maintain a hopeful spirit. *“I can shake off everything when I write; my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn,”* she wrote on April 5, 1944.

Anne Frank's diary illustrates the power of how writing can help a fatigued spirit rise above the most horrific of circumstances. Her diary is a story of faith, hope and love in the face of inhumanness and hate. *“I know what I want, I have a goal, an opinion, I have a religion and love. Let me be myself and then I am satisfied. I know that I’m a woman, a woman with inward strength and plenty of courage.”*