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Sandra Marinella on the Healing Power of Writing Our Stories

by Sandra Yeyati

An award-winning teacher and author of *The Story You Need to Tell: Writing to Heal from Trauma, Illness, or Loss*, Sandra Marinella has empowered thousands of people to use stories, poems and journal writing to find greater well-being and resilience in their lives. Prompted by a breast cancer diagnosis and her own journal, she helps people connect with their truth and move beyond entrenched negative emotions and thoughts.



are obsessed with, is generally being re-played in the emotional centers, or right side, of your brain, and you don't have much control over it. To get unstuck, you need to voice this story and complete it. Writing it down and sifting through it later can help. Once you do this, you can be logical and choose how you're go-

ing to interpret, frame and live with it.

In the book, I talk about Chris, whose sister was homeless and died. He was struggling with that story. It was going around in his mind, over and over, all the time. He was in pain and grieving from the loss of his sister. It took him a while before he decided to rewrite the story as fiction, telling it in the way he wished it had come out. In the process, he was able to better understand his loss, make peace with it and set it free.

How do we edit our stories while remaining grounded in reality?

We do not want to lie to ourselves. We want to know our truth, but there is so much wisdom in what we call "positive illusions". If we can choose to take a hard story and see it in a very positive way, we can find threads of it that we can weave through our truth, and let that help us grow and make our vision of our story better.

What is the power of story and personal writing?

We all have stories in our minds that play over and over again. They define who we are. In recent years, neuroscience has led us to this powerful understanding that we are quite flexible as human beings. After we become conscious of our stories and how we're using them in our lives, we can rework and reframe them, and choose to see them in a positive or better light. We can change and grow our stories to become better people with greater well-being.

How do we get unstuck from playing out stories in our minds?

A story that keeps looping, one that you

If we don't tell others or write our stories, can they harm us?

Yes. I think they can, but I don't want to underestimate the value of silence. When we are facing trauma, we need space and time and silence to be able to wrap our heads around the hard things that are happening to us. But then, breaking the silence is cathartic. It releases the pain. It helps us establish not only that we have the pain, but how we can bear it. Later, we can come back to those words and reflect on them—that's when we come to understand more about where we are, what we think, what we feel and how we can move forward and rewrite and regrow our stories in positive ways.

Do you have any recommendations for those suffering in these trying times?

I've interviewed many war veterans, and they said that when they were out in the midst of warfare, they had to put their thoughts and emotions on hold so that they could move forward and be strong. That's why many of them were falling apart with PTSD afterwards. I also interviewed a few soldiers who carried journals into war and found it extremely helpful to be able to scream, yell and release their words into them. We should be giving all healthcare workers journals and online support on how to write and how to take care of themselves. Counseling and therapy are wonderful, and I wish we could provide it to everybody all the time, but we can't; and journal writing, or any kind of therapeutic writing, is such a wonderful backup for a human being to have when they are struggling. Keeping a pandemic journal might prove to be not only a healthy choice for our times, but a treasure historically for our grandchildren.

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