

The healing power of the pen

Avid writer Christina Christou says you can heal your past and create a happier, healthier new future for yourself by putting pen to paper

By Carole Richardson

Since her early teens, Christina Christou has suffered bouts of depression. She has also kept a diary.

Over the years, she has chronicled the ups as well as the downs of her life and found that it has become an increasingly powerful way of controlling her thoughts.

"Writing for me became a way to focus on the positive. I can't understand what I am thinking until I've written it down. Muddled thoughts are muddled thoughts.

"Once you've got them down in black and white, you can see them more clearly and make sense of them," explains the softly spoken mother of three from Birmingham.

Keeping a diary is a comforting habit that has seen her through some of life's most stressful experiences. These included the death of her mother, Destina,

at 62 and her own battle with breast cancer. Now she's encouraging others to do the same with a practical book called Write Therapy.

"Keeping a diary is like speaking to a friend without being interrupted and you can say everything that's on your mind. You don't have to watch what you're saying. If I've got a problem, I write it down. Sometimes inspiration pops up, at other times it just helps me calm down," she says.

Christina (48) always dreamed of being a professional writer as a schoolgirl. She was educated in England, but after taking her A-Levels she moved back to her parents' native Cyprus where she worked as a bookkeeper in the travel industry.

After marrying at 22, her ambition remained on hold as she was kept busy bringing up her sons, Panayiotis and George, and her daughter, also named Destina. Nevertheless, she carried on writing down her innermost thoughts, especially during her darker moments.

"My mother suffered from depression and it can be a learned behaviour as well as being genetic. Writing down my thoughts just seemed to help. As long as I can remember I've always had a notebook. I've always questioned things.

"In the beginning I used to write poems and the process helped to clear my mind. I've since done some research that suggests it is a safe way to tap into and acknowledge your emotions. The rhyming effect of poetry can be very powerful."

Following the breakdown of her marriage, Christina moved back to England with her children, but returned to Cyprus when her mother was diagnosed with a brain tumour two years before she died in November 2005.

Christina nursed her mother during the last two months of her life. Writing proved to be an invaluable therapy for coping during that difficult period and afterwards, back in England, with her bereavement.

"I stayed strong at the time but two or three months later I began having panic attacks. I'd wake up crying and didn't want to do anything."

Prescribed antidepressants, she

admits they took the edge off her depression but says it was writing that kept her sane. At the same time she began reading self-help books and studying psychology.

"Grief doesn't go away, but it changes. Writing about it helped me to reach an acceptance. It is not a cure, but it is an effective tool to help with painful memories."

When Christina was diagnosed with a rare type of breast cancer in August last year, her diary was once again put to good use.

"I really had to dig deep, but writing down my fears straightened up my feelings and helped me to stay positive."

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Today, Christina has a new partner, Peter, and feels confident that she has beaten breast cancer. She is also celebrating her first venture into publishing. Write Therapy encourages people to cope with life's difficulties by writing down their feelings. It provides guidance with simple, specific

writing exercises and includes uplifting quotations.

"The process of writing helped clear my mind so I thought why wouldn't it help others? I'd always wanted to write a book and the idea of writing about writing just popped into my head when I was in the shower, of all places."

Deciding against contacting mainstream publishers, Christina opted to self publish with the help of social media and crowd funding (in which people pre-order and pay up front). Once she had a minimum of 250 orders, the book could be printed.

"My passion now is to empower and help other people," says Christina, who is also studying a counselling course.

As she states at the beginning of the book: "It is not a lesson in correct grammar, punctuation or language. Write therapy is an accessible way to tap into your emotions and find release with the power of writing."

"Anybody can do it. It is also cheap as you don't need any special equipment and you can do it anywhere. All you need is a pen and some paper," she says.

+ Write Therapy by Christina Christou is available from www.britainsnextbestseller.co.uk and Amazon. Priced £8.99 in paperback; 98p Kindle download



Christina's tips for getting started

Before picking up your pen or hitting the keyboard, Christina suggests doing one of the following to get you in the best frame of mind for writing and help with the creative flow of words:

- + Play some soothing music as you allow your mind to wander.
- + Do yoga stretches to help you feel relaxed and alert.
- + Look out of the window at the clouds or the trees.
- + Light a candle or two to create a serene atmosphere.
- + Heat some essential oils to release a relaxing scent.

She also suggests treating yourself to a new notebook or diary for the purpose, decorating it beautifully and starting every writing session on a new page. Date the page and write the title Inspirations. If you find it difficult to write anything, begin by doodling.



YOURS + EVERY FORTNIGHT

Main picture: Christina today and inset with her mother, Destina

