

HARNESSING JOURNALING TO SUPPORT CLIENTS AND OURSELVES THROUGH TRAUMA

Through her highly personal account of journaling through trauma, **Marianne Rosen** demonstrates the power of this activity to instil gratitude, form habits and enable restoration. This insight led to her collaboration with **Jo Permaul** on a transformational journaling course.

MARIANNE ROSEN:

In December 2022, a week before Christmas, my ex-partner died by suicide.

That description is a label on a door, my foot firmly against it.

So let me elaborate, open the door so to speak.

In December 2022, a week before Christmas, our young daughter was putting up the Christmas tree with her best friend at my ex-partner's home. He called his elderly mother in to look after them, went into the snowy yard of his family farm, and ended his life. Prescription drugs, three gas tanks, and a loaded shotgun. An hour later, they found him.

Now the trauma is a little closer.

As we were still navigating separation and fully co-parenting, our lives were practically and financially wound up in each other's. This closeness had enabled us to prioritise our child but now became the source of every further wound. Social taboo, public blame, family fallout, home loss, pet loss, lifestyle loss, income loss, will dispute, legal debt.

Now you see the impact.

I have come to understand this about trauma: most people don't want you to open the door or invite them into the room. The only thoughts I could coherently express in that room were, I'm glad the gas tanks worked... I'm so desperately grateful he didn't take our daughter with him... I am filled with rage. From the few people I shared them with, there was nothing but silence or silencing in return.

Swiftly, I recognised that I needed to turn elsewhere. But with health services at bursting point, I found myself on a long, long waiting list.

In this moment, I was oddly fortunate. I am both a writer and a lifelong diarist. I have been keeping journals in one form or another since I was eight years old. Journaling has always been a place of counsel for me. I turned instinctively to the place where I could give voice: my journals.

While many people understand that journaling is good for your mental health, there is less awareness that journaling is more than putting pen to

paper (though it can be that). It is exercise for the mind. There are many ways to workout physically. Do you run? Or do yoga? Or lift weights? There are many forms to journaling, and each of them has a different function.

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I began structuring my journaling: the left page grounded me with gratitude and focus, the right allowed me to offload emotions. This routine sustained me through the early months. As their influence supported me, I began to look for systems to deepen what I was doing. Searching through books written about grief and trauma, I came across the Dual Process Model of Grief. Developed by Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut in 1999, this framework teaches that grief oscillates between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented processes. My double-paged journaling mirrored this balance and created containment. I began to function better in the world because I could offload before venturing into it and, as I began to consciously limit the pages devoted to loss, it increased the proportion I was devoting to restoration.

Understanding that different forms of journaling aid different goals is a crucial skill in its success as a mental wellbeing tool. For example, understanding that in the depths of survival mode, I needed gratitude journaling rather than abundance. Understanding that my page structure nurtured habit formation. Utilising tools like the Wellbeing Wheel to help me prioritise amidst chaos.

As the one-year anniversary approached, I sat down to mark the day with my journal and make decisions about where I would be in another year's time. My fiction writing had suffered in the aftermath but, rather than bemoaning this loss, I leaned into my non-fiction writing as a new focus; transformation through journaling and writing. Recognising journaling's

profound impact on my wellbeing, I became determined to share this tool with others. My search for accredited resources returned very little but led me to Jo Permaul and another opportunity for transformation.

JO PERMAUL:

As a seasoned coach and director of a training school, I've seen firsthand the unique role journaling plays in helping clients process trauma. We know that trauma sits heavy, often making it difficult for clients to find words or even feel safe enough to explore their pain. As coaches, we're not therapists, but we do have powerful tools to help clients process and move forward. Journaling, when used thoughtfully, offers containment, gives voice, and opens a path to transformation.

Trauma can feel chaotic, leaving people overwhelmed. Journaling creates a quiet, private space for clients to capture those feelings. Writing their thoughts down allows them to externalise their emotions, giving them structure, so they feel less intense and unpredictable. Journaling can create breathing room to reflect on their experiences without feeling engulfed by them.

Trauma often leaves people feeling unheard, their voices silenced. Encouraging clients to journal gives them a way to reclaim that voice. They can name what happened, express what they couldn't say before, and allow themselves to feel the full range of their emotions. In this way, journaling becomes a form of self-validation, an act of recognising their story as real and meaningful.

The real beauty of journaling is how it allows clients to transform. Over time, as they read and revisit what they've written or drawn, they can start to see shifts – moments of growth, new insights, even strengths that they may not have realised before. This reflective process becomes a path for healing, helping them to integrate their trauma into a story of resilience and renewal.

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And let's not forget that journaling isn't just for clients, it's a practice that supports us as coaches, too. It's a mirror that helps us see our own biases, assumptions, and challenges, giving us a chance to deepen our empathy and stay connected to our purpose. In my own journey with journaling, I've seen it nudge me out of my comfort zones, helping me to grow and challenge myself in ways I hadn't expected. It reminds me of why I chose this path and helps me stay open-hearted and grounded in my work. For those of us guiding clients through trauma, journaling enhances our ability to hold space for others.

Collaboration as expanded potential: launching the transformative journaling course

Marianne was looking for an accredited journaling course but found few options, and I had just taken over the business from my predecessor with a journaling course in need of refreshment. I saw journaling's rising potential as a transformative practice, yet managing a new business took every spare minute. Born out of synergy, necessity, and a wholehearted immersion in challenge (perhaps the growth stretched just a little bit further than anticipated!), the Transformational Journaling course emerged—a powerful testament to growth and the magic of synchronicity. Spanning 16 weeks, this deeply immersive experience invites participants to explore eight unique journaling forms, each designed to inspire reflection, growth, and transformation.

One of the aspects I've enjoyed learning from Marianne is how utilising these journal forms connect to different results. For example, I knew there was a difference between gratitude and abundance, but I didn't know exactly how to explain that. Marianne describes these two different practices with a wonderful metaphor that made it so immediately available to users. When we think of gratitude, we consider giving our life a great big hug, holding it close and loving the wealth of all that we have. And when we consider abundance, we are looking to open our arms wide and invite in the riches coming toward us.

Marianne also explains how gratitude is 'a retrospective mindset that can be a useful tool to shift negativity and reawaken joy in what is' while abundance is 'a prospective mindset that can help you courageously plan for future possibilities'. Practicing gratitude is expanded to harness the different nuances of gratitude, glimmers and gifts. While abundance is connected to the practice of giving as an act of trust in the inherent abundance of the universe.

Furthermore, in the online session that accompanied that module, Marianne linked them as journal forms to mindfulness by leading a writing exercise using chakra expressions to work through gratitude and into abundance. In the reflection from this exercise, it was empowering to see how everyone could feel the point at which resistance cropped up for them, and what they learned from this apparently simple process. Further discussion about how to utilise this in practice led one student to feel confident enough to offer it the following week in a leadership group programme, sharing the results back with the students in the next week's online session and enabling a deeply collaborative learning environment.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Marianne Rosen is an author, journal coach, and advocate for writing as a means of healing and growth. With a background in entrepreneurship, literature, and teaching, she transitioned to a writing career after two decades in design. Her journaling practice began in childhood and has been a constant companion through life's transformations. Today, she empowers others to explore the impact of narratives in their lives and encourages them to rewrite their own stories. She also hosts Rewrite Today, a newsletter that combines storytelling with journal prompts for regular encouragement.



Jo Permaul is Director at Wellness Professionals At Work. She is also a qualified Homeopath, Holistic Life Coach and teacher and is a real advocate for the mind, body, spirit connection in wellness. Jo would love everyone to engage more in journaling! You can find out more about Marianne and Jo's course at <https://wellnessprofessionalsatwork.com/certificate-in-transformational-journaling/>