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Her first book *Write Your Way to Happiness* is particularly personal as it explains the tools for using writing in a therapeutic way and is predominantly filled with stories from the author's experience.

Write Your Way To Happiness

*Why you should start writing for
your well-being today*

By Alexandra Bădiță

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CHAPTER 1

What does Writing Therapy mean?

We live in a fast-pace society. Our lives rush on at a hundred miles per hour and we constantly feel pressure from mentalities that have put their stamp on us. Sooner or later, everyone goes through a mental breakdown, an episode of anxiety or fear. Many will hit rock bottom and deal with depression. Some might find their way back. Others will struggle for years and years with the dark side of their mind.

While the best way to overcome a tough time in your life is by facing it, we rarely find the determination or the knowledge straight away. If you are lucky and have some good friends, or you figure it out by yourself, you will be directed towards therapy, counselling, mentors or coaches.

Even though we live in a society where everyone struggles with mental health, it doesn't mean that we are more open to talk about it. That is where it all goes wrong, because if we were talking about it, so many lives would be changed. Instead, we tend to hide. We hide from ourselves, we hide for fear of being judged. If we do end up seeing a therapist, then God-forbid we ever confess this to anyone! Therapy is for crazy people, that's what

we've been told while growing up. Therapy is when they tie you up with a long-sleeved shirt and lock you in a room with pillows on the walls.

These misconceptions keep traditional therapy taboo. We don't talk about it, even with our closest friends and family. Little do they know that therapy in fact gives you the tools to dig deep into your feelings and find the root of your problems. People tend to believe that going to therapy is like going to a guru: You'll spill the beans about your entire life and the therapist will magically solve everything. Well, it is important to keep in mind that the role of the therapist is not to sort out your life. No. Instead, the role of the therapist is to discover the source of your pain, what you need and give you the tools for you to do the work. No matter what kind of problem you're being supported through, whether moving on after loss or achieving goals you've been putting aside, you need to show up. You need to do the work with the tools provided. If you don't take part in the journey, you could just end up going for sessions for years and years and nothing will change. That is because your expectations are unrealistic. You are waiting for the solution to just show up in front of you. Remember. You cannot just sit on a couch and talk, you need to take action.

When I went to my first therapy session a few years back, I had no idea what to expect. I thought, just like pretty much everyone else, that I would lie down on a couch, speak about my pain and the therapist would say, "Why don't you do this and that?" And I would say back, "Oh my God, you are so right!" And then my mental health would be restored. And I would be back in the

game. Looking back, I couldn't have been more wrong. It wasn't a magical fix which was important in that first month, what was important was the tools and exercises that were given to me that helped me break through my patterns of thinking. If I hadn't taken action or realised that I am a continuous work in progress, none of the shifts would have happened.

This is where therapeutic writing comes into play. When you need to find a way to move forward, when you are motivated, you will take the necessary steps for healing. It's important that you are open to trying out what fits your needs and that you are paying attention to how each tool interacts with your mind.

You might have heard about alternative therapy methods. Most of the time these include different ways of expressing yourself in the way you feel most comfortable with. Art is very often used as an expression of self, an inner journey that the artist takes for self-discovery. Based on your skills and expertise, you might find yourself tempted to try out therapeutic methods like painting, sculpting, dancing or - why not - interior design or fashion. While they are all very useful ways to explore your inner self and to express yourself, there is one art that seems to be the most accessible and affordable: writing.

Don't get me wrong, I am a strong believer in investing in yourself, but some might be put off by the cost of a sculpting class or the prices of a high-quality canvas and brushes. The truth is, all you need for writing is a pen and a piece of paper. It couldn't be easier than this!

You may argue that while you have a pen and some paper, why not start drawing? Absolutely. If that's how you express yourself and you can do it, you should. It's brilliant. For me, however, and many of us, if you give us a pencil and paper we will think about writing instead of drawing. This is because we have all been taught to write and read from a young age and so for most people it will be a comfortable option. I personally have terrible drawing skills. I would never feel like I'm properly expressing my feelings with my attempts to put forms together on paper. With writing though, I can.

Writing is an art in itself. If you are truly inclined towards writing, you will want to explore the creative side of it, dive into fiction, build utopian worlds where your characters reflect your way of thinking. Some might struggle when coming up with an imaginative setup, a plot and characters. Instead, write from your heart. Write about what goes on in your mind. It is the *easiest* way to heal yourself and find your happiness.

When used for therapeutic purposes, writing is all about connecting your thoughts with your feelings. The way you feel in each and every moment of a day is determined by the thoughts that go through your head. Situations don't determine feelings, thoughts do. By understanding this and exploring this causality, you will be on the way to successful healing.

Thoughts and feelings go hand in hand in such a way that we don't see it on a daily basis. The second we become aware of this relation, we get to be in control of our thoughts. We can shift the way we feel and we can build our way to happiness. The same awareness and

control will allow you to let go of what is not useful to you, what keeps you stuck and what makes you unhappy. The first step to all these major changes is being open and being willing to take action.

Writing can become part of your daily routine. The sooner you experience getting out of your head, the better. Taking one step back and seeing things objectively, while writing them down, will help you make sense of what is bothering you and where you need to work. Just stay present. Make sure you keep an open mind towards contradictory feelings that may arise throughout the journey. We are complex creatures. Our minds are wired in a complicated way. You might find that a thought generates both joy and worry or that there are multiple things that can contribute to your happiness in one single moment.

You need to stay true to the process and to yourself. The hand will translate whatever goes through your mind and put it into words. Identifying thoughts and writing them down will make sense of the feelings in your heart. It will even make sense of the physical sensations that go through your body.

You know that feeling in the pit of your stomach when you think about quitting your job? That is called fear, my dear. It is the body's reaction to your thought of generating change in your life. On a subconscious level, all the repercussions of this decision start unravelling. Your gut is built by default in safe mode, so it hurts when it is shaken. Without even realising, your thoughts are all about the bills you need to pay, the money and security this job offers you, the comfort of seeing the payroll at

the end of the month. Yes, the comfort, because this is what it is about, that comfort zone that our gut wants to keep us in. It's cosy, it's safe, it's not risky. The body is accustomed to being comfortable and cosy. It doesn't want you to change anything. So it reacts. It makes you feel sick. It distracts you from the decision. This is where your work has to come into play.

Most people are not aware of the process above. They end up forgetting about their decision. However, you are not most people. Write it all down. Go through the process. Dig deeper and deeper. Then you'll realise that the feeling in the pit of your stomach is in fact fear, a fear that is waiting to be defeated. All you need to do is to take the risk, make the decision and quit that job. If it is what you truly want, you will find solutions to provide for yourself. This is something that we will explore in a future chapter of this book.

When I started teaching writing as a therapy method, people would be suspicious. I would explain to them that my purpose is not to judge the way they are feeling and what they are writing. My purpose is to show them a way of being their own therapists. Isn't that a good return of investment?

You don't have to be a writer in order to use writing therapy. By learning how to use writing to your own benefit, you will discover how this truly powerful tool can completely transform your life. When you become comfortable with facing your inner demons and writing them down, you will understand yourself better. You will be able to see your own worth and your own value. You will know how to put writing into practice as a way of

lifting your spirits and creating a safe space for your thoughts and feelings. You will become your own therapist. You will become *the master of your own life*.

The truth is, writing is already part of your life. Whether you write an email, a shopping list or a Thank You card, you are putting a piece of yourself in that paragraph or on that paper. When you start practicing writing on a daily basis, it will become a habit. You will start feeling more connected, more grounded, more focused. All that mess you feel inside of you will start to make sense. It will reorganise. You will reconnect with your true feelings.

In order to get to the bottom of your feelings, you need to start asking yourself questions. Most of all, you need to be ready to give yourself honest answers. Without that honesty you cannot start the healing process. Of course, the most uncomfortable questions often trigger the deepest truths. You have to dig deeper than the surface, layer by layer, like peeling back an onion, to find your inner thoughts and patterns, and it is that which will cause the change. You will write those truths down. When you take a step back and look objectively at what you have uncovered, it will be earth-shattering. The true transformation waits at the deepest level. It waits beside the heart of the problem.

The most popular way of writing to yourself is journaling. Many people tend to keep a diary in their early years, when they feel like they are not understood by anyone, but drop out of the habit. Journaling is indeed one of the easiest ways to use writing, mainly because you can do it any way you want. You can write anything you

want, you can be open, you can be ruthless. You also get to see change over time if you re-read it. Oh boy, realising how we grow up and how our thinking develops and changes can be overwhelming, but I promise you, it is amazingly helpful. I will dive deeper into journaling in one of the future chapters and we will explore the benefits of writing in a diary, as well as tips and tricks to make the most out of its potential.

While journaling is a way of writing just for yourself, I am also a strong believer in writing for sharing. Writing with the purpose of sharing is about shouting your story out to the world and making your point of view known. However, you don't need to project it on a large scale. You could just share it with that particular person you never got the chance to speak to. Maybe you want to ask for forgiveness, maybe they hurt you or maybe you were the one who caused the pain. Or perhaps you just want to let the other person know that you are thinking about them.

Sharing your thoughts in writing is powerful. People tend to get scared of it. The power of the written word is ten times greater than a spoken word. Written words tend to become heavier, potentially because we visualise the word and we imagine the intention of the tone. We can even keep these physical pieces of writing as legacy. It can be daunting.

Just by writing this book, I am aware that all I am putting down here is going to be out there in the world for everyone to read. There is no turning back. There is no chance to edit it once it hits the printer. But, at the thought of readers who will embark on a journey to

explore their full potential because of this writing, all my worries fade away, and I continue typing with excitement.

Writing with the purpose of sharing gets you to start facing fears that you have been avoiding since this morning, since a few days or even years ago. You might get to share the writing with the person your writing is about or you can choose to let a wider audience have a peek into your story. Stories bring people together. There is always someone else going through something similar. Not everyone is willing to share their take on the situation, but everyone finds comfort in realising they are not alone.

When you start writing, the highest revelation is the sense of freedom. The truth is we hold onto emotions for too long. We become trapped, just like how those emotions are trapped in us. Maybe we want to get rid of them, but we don't know how. So we just keep revisiting them over and over again. We keep bringing them to life, never releasing them. How would you feel if I told you that writing down your emotions will get you that freedom you have been craving? When putting your pen to paper it will feel like unlocking a cage of doves, setting them free, never to be seen again. Can you imagine how much lighter you would feel? How much space you would be freeing up, just like clearing a memory stick, making room for new files and documents, in the form of emotions and experiences?

Life can sometimes be an unfair deal. There are so many occasions when we are left with words unsaid. Just think of this scenario: you get into an argument with your partner. They say all these mean things to you, they