

Transkript S02-01 – Kathleen Adams

Michaela Muschitz

Herzlich Willkommen zur 2. Staffel unseres Podcasts „Tinte und Courage“. Wir freuen uns, diese Staffel mit einem ganz besonderen Gast zu eröffnen. Mit Kathleen Adams, die Pionierin des Journal Writings. Die uns natürlich auf Englisch Frage und Antwort stehen wird. Und ich übergebe der Claudia, die das Ganze moderieren wird.

Claudia Scheidemann

Danke, Michaela. Yeah, well, yes, let's switch to English and I'll try my very best. And because I have to say I'm a little bit star struck because your books, Kathleen, are always on my desk when I'm preparing for workshops or writing sessions. So it's really an honor and a very special occasion to have you on the podcast. Last, yeah, as Michaela already said, you're one of the Pioneers of journal therapy, journal writing, personal writing, and you're also a psychotherapist, educator and pioneering journal therapist based in Denver, Co, USA. The mission of your business, the Center for Journal Therapy, is to make the healing art and science of journal writing accessible to all who desire self-directed change. You enact this mission through training educators, facilitators, coaches, and therapists in the evidence-based theory and standards-based practice of expressive and therapeutic writing.

Kathleen has authored 14 books on writing and healing, including the best-selling journal to the Self as editor and contributor. The collected work, Expressive Writing Foundations of Practice, and with Deborah Ross, Your Brain on Ink. Sorry.

After 40 years of pioneering work you are now returning to your roots and facilitate ongoing ongoing journal writing groups, workshops and events on ZOOM and throughout the US and Europe. And so, welcome to our podcast. And yeah, we we have, we could talk with with you about the gazillion different things related to journaling and personal writing and expressive writing. And I would like to start with with a question how this journey started for you. What is what, what made it clear to you that this is the thing you want to do with your life or your life's work?

Kathleen Adams

Thank you so much for the question and thank you for having me on your podcast. I'm so excited to be here. I met you both in Salzburg earlier this year and it was such a wonderful event. I facilitated a 2 day workshop. Yeah, two day workshop. Four, three, two ...

Claudia Scheidemann

3 days.

Kathleen Adams

How long were we there? So felt like a lifetime of fun and content. So how did I get started? I knew I wanted to be a writer when I grew up from the time I was very small. My older sister is 3 years older than I am and when she was 6 and I was 3, she now has a doctorate in elementary education. When she was 6 and I was 3, she would come home from first grade and teach me

everything she learned that day. So she was a teacher and I was a writer from the very beginning. When I was 10, I was gifted a little five-year walking diary from my favorite aunt. And I loved it because I had learned to read so early that I was a very good reader by the time I was, you know, in school. And I loved books. And I loved stories, and I wanted to write stories.

I knew that the magic, the imagination, the things that happened in my mind when I was reading a story that was engrossing, was just so powerful and so immediate. I wanted to write those stories, so my diary was my very first, well, it wasn't really my first attempt at writing. It was my first attempt at writing consistently. And it wasn't very interesting in the early days 'cause I was 10 and nothing interesting happened to me very often.

But I got in the habit of writing, and as I came into my teenage years, I was experienced as a writer, and I did have interesting things happening, and so I was able to pursue it in more depth. I still believed through high school and not so much college, I'd kind of given it up by college, but I wanted to write fiction. I wasn't so sure that I was good at fiction, but I did know that writing was going to be a part of my career. I was a journalist before I was a therapist and a journaler. All the way through. So. So that's how it started. It's just been a lifelong practice of mine.

Claudia Scheidemann

What what I found so interesting is that in the in the English speaking countries, journaling or expressive writing is really something that is well known and well practiced. Also throughout different areas, not just in, in a therapeutic settings and sometimes here I have the feeling that people think that something like the new hype with all these new journaling types or journaling books that are coming up on Instagram. Everything is somehow journaling and but, but that puts it too much in in the niche of: Well, it's a nice hobby that you can do. And what would you tell people if if somebody came up this with with this perspective on writing?

Kathleen Adams

Thank you. I do think that it is a little later to catch on in Europe and around the world, but based on the global traffic that we have at the Center for Journal Therapy, I know there are lots of people who, even though it's fairly new in their countries or their regions or communities. They are still very, very interested in, you know, I started out with six friends on my living room floor who acted like I knew what I was doing and I knew immediately when my friends asked me to teach a journal writing workshop and I said get a notebook, it's not hard. And they said, well, it's not hard for you. So I put together a little workshop that I didn't think I would ever teach again. It was just to my friends and I knew immediately that that was my work, and at that time this was 1985. When I started my first workshop and in 1985. What you described Claudia about, you know, it's a nice hobby or it is kind of frivolous or it's self-indulgent or it's a waste of time. You know, your navel gazing. That was a big one. You know you're just.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, exactly.

Kathleen Adams

...being a Hippie. The. That was kind of the culture. I mean, we were writing diaries, but we were doing it at night under the covers with a flashlight. You know, the way I used to read books when I was 5, the ... So what we know now.

Thanks to the large and impressive body of research that has happened. Thank you. Thank you. Doctor Pennebaker. James Pennebaker is the research psychologist who has since the late '70s, been studying the use of writing for healing, literally physical, emotional, physiological, situational, relational healing. There have been by now thousands.

I think the last estimate I heard from him was more than 3.000 studies have been done that look at the impact of writing in a journal or a diary or on a computer screen. The correlation between writing and actual healing, and he personally has published something like 250 papers or something. It's, it's vast. So there's a lot of evidence now that writing actually does help us in ways that are not at all self-indulgent. But rather are self-compassionate. And I just know from 40 years of doing this work and 60 plus years of doing my own journal that that there is immediate outcomes.

But back to your question, what about people who are not familiar with it? Well, we all have to start somewhere and this work has been... In my career I have watched the work move from a few hardy pioneers who were doing this work in the 70s and early 80s. And really laying down some foundations for those of us who followed.

So Christina Baldwin was teaching at the Loft in Minneapolis, MN, and Tristine Rainer was teaching with the famous diarist Anaïs Nin in California, and Doctor Pennebaker was doing his work, and Lucia Capacchione, who has since passed, was doing a combination of art therapy and journal writing. And these were the people whose work I followed when I was getting started. I mean, I taught my first class, knew that it was my life's work and immediately started researching it. I didn't know...

I didn't know anything about anybody else writing diaries and I found the work of Christina Baldwin and Tristine Rainer and Lucia Capacchione, and those were my ... there was a lot of confirmation that we were all kind of saying the same thing, but we were doing it in different ways. And my approach because I was a first semester graduate student in counseling at that point, my approach was the intersection of writing and healing. Tristine Rainer's work was the intersection of writing and personal narrative. Christina Baldwin's was the personal relationship with writing and the Self. Pennebaker was the personal relationship between writing and health considerations.

So, you know, for those who are listening who are saying, whoa, I just, this is brand new and I don't exactly know how to get started. Just start, it's the wonderful thing about writing is that it's very, very flexible and fluid and able to be customized to any personal style, which is one of the really great things that you don't. You know, the only rule of journal writing is date your entries and forget the other rules. That's two rules, date your entries and then don't worry about anymore rules. Do what you want to do, so I think we'll probably layer down into that, but does that more or less answer your question?

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, it it does. And and what what you said also describes when I started my my education in, in, in Journaling I was also a little bit well not not a little bit. I was very overwhelmed when learning. Oh, there are so many intersections and for me, as a former pharmacist, of course, Pennebaker, with measuring immune function and visits to the doctors afterwards, was really mind-blowing. And it it it, it really is important I think also to boil it down and say OK, just grab

pen and paper and start with whatever method with whatever comes across and and just just start it.

Kathleen Adams

Pen and paper or a keyboard? Any keyboard will. There's no ... I participated in a study, a research study on digital journal writing, and I think that I wrote the paper in 2015, so it must have been 2015 that it was that the study happened. But one of my friends, Nathan Orrin who was gifted a website on journal writing from a friend of his who went back to his day job because he wasn't making a living as a having a journal website. But he had he mostly worked with men. This guy that Nathan got the website from, he had a lot, a lot, a lot of men writing on his website, which is, you know, we don't see that many men in, in the, in the workshops and the classes and even online it's much more popular with women than it is. Well, it's much more popular and known for women than men. If men are writing, they're keeping it private.

But anyway, Nathan had this really large number of men that he was being introduced to, and he did a what he called a 30-day digital journaling challenge. That invited people all over the world, both genders, to participate in 30 days of writing two prompts. But using it, you know, using a device, your phone or, you know, any app on your phone. And we did a pre and post-test. And found out that there's no significant difference in how men and women write. But men have an easier time getting started when they have permission to write on a keyboard or a device. So women prefer devices err prefer handwriting. Men do not prefer handwriting. There was a 19 point gap between how comfortable women said they were writing by hand and how comfortable men said they were writing by hand. So my one take-away from, you know, like the big-take away that I wanted to impress on the people who were reading this report was if you are working with men as well as women, and you give them permission to write on a device they will more likely have success than if they think they have to write by hand because they just don't like it.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah.

Kathleen Adams

And so that one thing just permission to write however you want, including on a computer or a phone.

Claudia Scheidemann

I mean the best. The best journal is the one that you start and keep because you like the method.

Kathleen Adams

Exactly. That's. I'm going to steal that. Thank you. The best is that you start and continue.

Claudia Scheidemann

Also, I mean that that's also something we we discussed in, in former episodes this this gap why do women write more than men? And but but you said well maybe they just don't write in groups. They write privately at home, but in general. When you take up the the the habit of writing or journaling, personal writing, what could be expected of it? What, what is the benefit?

Kathleen Adams

Well, how long do we have? One of the benefits is getting to know yourself at all kinds of levels and all kinds of moods to know oneself with certainty is a lifetime task and the more we write the more we normalize the reality that every single one of us has a universe within us that is sometimes angry, sometimes frustrated, sometimes scared, sometimes jubilant or happy, or confused. We see ourselves in lots of different states and none of them are wrong. It's not. It's not wrong to be mad. It's not wrong to be scared. It is preferable to be mindful when you are angry or scared or confused, and the journal will reveal that.

So you know a great starting point for anybody is "Today, write now I feel..." and then just finish that sentence and keep going with it. I am one who tends to suggest that balance in the journal is a really useful strategy. So when I'm working with clients or writers who say, well, you know, yeah, I do write a journal, but I don't really like to because I only write it when I'm down. And when I'm trying to, you know, figure something out that is too hard for me. And so, you know, I don't really ... I like to write when I need to, but I need to what I write when I need to write I don't like, is kind of what they're saying.

And to balance, I mean it doesn't have to be a 50:50 balance, but a little bit of positive reinforcement, a little bit of humor, a little bit of light will go a long way to balance some. You know, kind of thrashing about, I don't know what to do and I'm so scared and nobody cares. And I'm all alone and you know that can ... The nurturing that comes from just a self-compassionate little moment of you know. Oh, come on. You're doing the best you can. And it's good enough. You know, we'll get through this.

We all have inner allies. You know the the inner cheerleader who wants us to succeed and the inner coach that guides us along the way and and when we can access those resources in writing, it can be a game changer. People can actually find that they can... have good ideas that help them solve their own problems and do it in a way that isn't painful or disruptive or as painful and disruptive. You know we can't promise that it's going to be perfect and beautiful, but we can promise that you will likely know more at the end of a write than you did before you started.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah. And often, often there are surprises. That's what I find when I'm writing. Especially when I think I know what I write about, or ... then it's like, oh, that was that was that's something different, showed up. And and I love what you said. And and I think this is something I took away from from the retreat earlier in the year. And I think you said it, it's also about writing the truth. Because if I only write negative things then I I'm not true to life, to myself and and that that got me because I have to admit I'm also more of a crisis writer, I would say and and not so much when it's about good things and.

Kathleen Adams

Yes. Yes.

Claudia Scheidemann

And I don't elaborate on them so much, I I try to change that and and especially it's also your your influence and and we'll come to that next the next question and and also to to umm we we always address this inner critic and how to silence him or her. And I like the approach to say, OK,

maybe we should start to look for the inner coach and make this voice louder instead of the other one suppressing or changing or whatever. And and to to look for that, that voice.

Kathleen Adams

Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

And and what you said is this this knowing about myself and self self explore self exploration for for me it took quite a while to to allow this to myself. Because what you said earlier about well that's just naval-gazing and it's just don't take yourself too important and. And for me it, and it was a certain kind of writing that that helped to overcome this.

Kathleen Adams

Yeah. And I think that we all have. You know, it's really nice to live a life in which you can trust yourself to tell yourself the truth. With love. And not have it be a big, you know, pile on of criticism and could have, would have, should have. And you know, you're so dumb. And how could you think that and what was wrong with you?

Those you know in moderation might be useful questions, but much more useful questions are what's the growth opportunity here, or what can I do differently, starting now, that would make a shift, or. Am I tired of this yet? Do I? Am I ready for change? Or do I need to just hang with it for a while longer and see what emerges? So you know there's a, there's a back in the day, you know, 30 plus years ago when Journal to the Self the book was published. The very first chapter was called "The 79 Cent Therapist" because that's how much a spiral notebook cost in 1988. But now it's kind of like the \$2.79 therapist or the 4.00 euro or whatever. But still, it's a bargain, you know, no matter what. And it was a little tongue in cheek because I was barely a therapist at that point. I had just graduated. But I really do believe that we can solve a lot of problems in our journals. I I really do and and it's helpful if you are kind to yourself along the way. I'm sorry I interrupted your question and so.

Claudia Scheidemann

You know all all fine, all fine.

Michaela Muschitz

I do find it very interesting to see sometimes when that's because there you said write down the date of your entry. I do so think it's very interesting to sometimes look back if something comes up again and again and then you can see that maybe this idea of do I really like to go on with this? [Yes.] Job or this whatever it is. And then you when you look back you can sometimes see. Oh, I had this idea. Of no, I'm not feeling very well with this any longer. I had this already three months ago and it's still here, so this then I can see. OK. It's not just an one day idea of I don't I want to quit my job. I'm not want to whatever.

Kathleen Adams

Write.

Michaela Muschitz

This something I do really think is very interesting to to you can sometime. See how an idea or a feeling develops and gets stronger and you can't do that with when you're just thinking things.

Kathleen Adams

Yes, yes. And in the immediate moment.

Michaela Muschitz

You're noting it down. You can see it.

Kathleen Adams

Yes, when you put it down, you can see it in the immediate moment. You can't see the context of it. The history, the before shadowing and if I can make a couple of points here, can I just kind of lean into the reflection write a little bit and then I had another one that just went out of my brain, but maybe it'll come back.

So the reflection write is a little device that I created for myself initially, but I also offered it to clients when I started in private practice and was doing group work. In hospitals and and the reflection write is just taking a little brief moment. At the end of the journal entry, when you're done writing to read it back and it doesn't have to be that minute. I mean, if you've only got 5 minutes to catch the bus and you need to go. Then do it on the bus or when you get home. But the the reflection write is a read back of what you have written. Taking it in as a curious reader would and then when you come to the end of it, dropping down a couple of lines and writing a reflection, that sounds like:

As I read this, I [fill in the blank] notice... I'm aware of... I'm curious about... As I read this, I'm surprised by... Those kinds of things, it's a reflective practice that when you do it and when you, you know, I always write my diagonally across the page so that I can find them easily when I'm paging through my journal, I can tell the reflection write because it's it looks different. You can use a yellow highlighter, you can draw a bubble around it. You can, you know, write it into different color ink. You can do all kinds of ways or just drop down two lines and indent the margins.

The reflection is the ... It harvests insight and it codifies expression and meaning and purpose. So as I read this, I notice that I think I've been writing about this quite a bit over the last two months.

That's your signal to go back two months and find out what was going on then and what's going on now and where there has been a difference. And if there have been reflection writes posted regularly, just like Michaela said, you can track your progress. You can see your movement or your not movement. When I was in my 20s, yes, I was still in my 20s. I was in a very, very tumultuous marriage. With a man who was emotionally abusive, not not physically, thank heavens, but emotionally. And I was... And he was really, really controlling. And so I had to hide my journal in a walking file cabinet because I knew he would read it if he could find it. I I don't even think he knew I wrote a journal. But if he did know, he would look until he found it, and then I would be punished for. You know, I would be harassed and all that for writing nasty things.

So I wasn't really very frequent with my writing either, but I came to a day when we had had some sort of big, you know, bang up fight and I retreated to the spare bedroom, which is where I did my writing, unlock the filing cabinet, wrote, wrote, wrote. You had this deja vu feeling like I I this is so familiar and I turned back to the last entry prior to the one I was writing in these days I didn't read back what I wrote and I didn't know about the reflection write. And it was almost word for word the same entry word for word of six months. And I thought, wow, this is like this. This is telling me something. I think I need help. And I got into therapy. I called my very first therapeutic experience was because. I read 2 journal entries side-by-side 6 months apart that said exactly the same thing, and I thought I am going nowhere fast. If anything, I'm spiraling down so I got some help and with my therapist's support I eventually was able to leave the relationship and my wife got better almost immediately. So yeah, reflection write!

Claudia Scheidemann

Reflection write, exactly that. That was something that was, that changed my journaling game, so to say very much to the better of course, because it makes it makes understanding things so much faster and and and similar experience with I got bored with what I was writing because it was always the same. Then I could reflect about that, and that was the way out so to say. We we talked a lot about now about learning more about yourself and solving life problems and challenges and overcoming stuff. And do you see personal writing also in the context of of business and business world, job world leadership questions? This isn't something where you. Use it or recommend it.

Kathleen Adams

Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. I have people who have graduated from our programs, who are executive coaches in in large companies and they do this work with CEO's and, you know, C-Suite people all the time and, you know, upper managers, middle managers and and rank and file employees. Yeah, there are a lot of ways. First of all, there's this whole time management, organizational management, outcome focused process that the journal can have.

And this is you know this is not exclusive by any means to business applications because it happens in personal journaling as well. But when it is applied to business applications, there are entire structures and strategies that teams can learn to use. Oftentimes writing can start. Personal writing can start in a team meeting where there's a whiteboard or, you know, a digital whiteboard, if we're meeting on ZOOM, where people can just contribute a brainstorm to look in the journal world, we call a cluster, which is the Gabriel Rico cluster. Rico was another one of the founding father's founding mothers and fathers of this work and she used the technique that she called clustering, which is writing a topic in the middle of a synth... in the middle of a page, circling it and then spinning thoughts off of other thoughts with lines and circles that are associative, and this associative thing in a brainstorming session in a team can lead to outcomes, because after everybody has, you know thrown something up on the whiteboard.

They everybody can stand back and say, look, this idea and that idea over there are kind of the same. So what if you two team up and develop that and then there can be writing prompts around that, a structured write that says "Right now the problem is..." and then leave a little space for that. "The biggest bottleneck we experience is..." and leave a little room for that. "What would work better would be if..."

I mean I'm making this up, but that kind of thing I like to use seven different writing prompts that all start with a short fill in the blank sentence. And it starts with an overview of the problem and it and you know. So number one is always what's, what's the story right now? What's the overview of the problem and the 7th one is always "My next step is..". So in between you can fill in those five with whatever feels relevant or useful to the situation, but if everybody you know say you want a team of five people, and you pass out this sheet of paper that has five, seven of these sentence stems spaced on the page so that there's enough time to. Enough space to write about. I don't know. You know, 25-30 words or. So a couple of sentences and you had all five people filling this out and then comparing them. What sort of a brain exchange is that?

I mean, you might have some really actionable items and it doesn't take very long. That's the other thing businesses really want: Efficient functioning. Writing- I mean it would take 10 minutes to fill out a seven sentence stem thing and another 10 minutes for everybody to read it around the circle. And then you've got the rest of your hour to discuss strategies, tasks, you know, deadlines, projects, whatever.

Claudia Scheidemann

Thank you. And if our German speaking listeners are now saying, well, I want to read books by Kathleen Adams. The problem is, as far as I know, there are still no none of your books available in German.

Kathleen Adams

I know.

Claudia Scheidemann

So any editors listening in to us and are willing to publish journaling books by Kathleen Adams in German. Please contact us because we are really eager to to have these gems available also in German and related to "Journal of the Self" I have on my desk right now here there's at least one thing we can we can talk about and that is a card set.

Which summarizes some of the main focus or main main writing prompts and writing methods in in a card deck of, I don't know, probably 60-50. Sixty cards, 48 cards, and I was I was really lucky I I I helped Birgit Schrieber to to translate the cards. So I'm I was I have them here as well and it's really. ... The interesting thing with this card set is you can pick any card and it's always the right card, so they they are color-coded. They have different qualities to them like creative and connecting, simple and structured.

Practical and productive, but but the the the the text on the on the reverse is is in German then and and it's really something. I I I really like that. So because sometimes you have that feeling of, I don't know what to write about. Then I pick a card and then it's something that and it always works so.

Kathleen Adams

Exactly. Yeah, I I'm amazed at how consistently I pull a card in the morning and my favorite story about that and and Birgit Schrieber in Bremen, Germany and you translated and she used the same designer that I used. So they look exactly like the American version.

Claudia Scheidemann

Exactly, yeah.

Kathleen Adams

So good for both of you for finishing that project, that was a big one. I love the story about how I. I was coming up on the launch to my community of the card deck and I was taking pre-orders so that I could have enough money to pay pay for the cards obligation with a healthy discount of course and I ran into a technical snag and couldn't get the website up that I was like, you know, trying to the land the sales page, it wasn't the website, it was the sales page and I had like 2 days before my big launch and I was just panicked.

So I put a I I just turned to my journal and and pulled the card. And so to you know. Whatever it is, I'm going. To write about it, and it was the card called "Act as if" and the prompt was: If you're stuck, just think of somebody who's successful in whatever it is you're stuck on and ask yourself. You know, if I were this person, what would I be doing? And so the first thing out of my pen was: If I had. If I if I were a successful person, what would I be doing and I and I wrote a successful person would already have a tech person on her team. So I immediately like spent that took me 30 seconds and so for the next 4 1/2 minutes I wrote an ad for one of the, you know, freelance marketplaces on the Internet and said I'm desperate for techie guy. Who can or girl who can help me get a sales page up? And you know, within an hour I had lots of answers and the nicest guy ever sent me a video saying I'm I'm. You know that I'm. I'm available and happy to help you, and I know this might sound kind of corny, but I'm a really nice guy. That's what I need a really nice guy. So he's still my tech guy and I adore him and I haven't needed a tech person since because I have one, so that's. Since when you act as if you already know the answer.

Claudia Scheidemann

So Journal to the Self is that one book of your many books and the other I really very often, as you can see, refer to is "Your Brain on Ink" That's a book you wrote together with Deborah Ross. And in that book you turned or coined the term self-directed neuroplasticity.

And I love that term. And can you just explain to our listeners what is behind that for you?

Kathleen Adams

Yes, Deborah Ross is the first author of your "Brain on Ink" because it's her work and her model. And I joke that she was the brains and I was the ink when we were writing because I'm I'm a more accomplished writing for publication writer than she is. And so she provided all the content well I provided some of the content, but mostly it's her theory and she's the one that coined the term self-directed neuroplasticity, and I really think you should do it podcast with Deborah Ross because she's brilliant and really fun.

So self-directed neuroplasticity. Deborah when she came into our school, the Therapeutic Writing Institute, which is a three-year program that teaches evidence-based theory and standards-based practice. Deborah was in her. When she started it, the Therapeutic Writing Institute. Her first year, she was a second-year student in a neuropsychology program that focused on neuroplasticity, and it was also a three-year program. So in her third year of neuroplasticity training, she was in her second year of TWI and took our my curriculum design

class. For her original curriculum, she created a workshop called “Your Brain on Ink”. And that became the foundation for her now really successful work.

She specializes in three areas, cancer, people who are in treatment or recovering from treatment and cancer, brain-injury services and mindfulness meditation communities. So with those 3 specialties she has built, you know, a brand, a business. You know a reputation, you name it.

So Deborah looks at writing in the same way that the mindfulness meditation community looks at meditating. It is a way to clear obstacles. Work toward peace and harmony and solution-focused compassionate outcomes, and it has all the benefits of the of. Positive benefits, positive neural benefits of meditation, yoga. You know, deep commitment to service work and whatever field you have. And so she was applying the principles of neuroplasticity, such as, you know, neurons that fire together, wire together. That's, you know, if you're forming new neural pathways, you have to have you know, I mean she, she has these metaphors. You can take the slow train that stops at every station or you can take the express train that gets you there faster and the process of building neural circuitry is like the the short train.

But once you have started to build it you can accelerate. So she has developed writing processes that mirror what happens when the brain is in a state that is receptive to neuroplasticity, and from those spaces she writes, we write together in the book. But it's all her content that part of it. You know, different writing prompts different ways to approach the writing that will bring you more in alignment with the way your brain organically functions when it is doing things that are positive toward producing neural pathways that will result in the express train being taken first

So you know she tells the story about how the Dalai Lama in the early stages of the neuroplasticity research. The the Dalai Lama wrote to some of the primary researchers that she studied with and said, you know, you have a lot of brain scans for people who are unhealthy. You know, they're criminals. They are very ill. They have severe mental illness and you're taking CAT scans of their brains, MRI's of their brains to see what lights up. But I think you might be getting a skewed perspective. Would you like to study the brains of monks. And the researchers, you know, first they fell down and then they said yes and invited the Dalai Lama himself to come. And he said, no, thank you. But I will send my monks. So a bunch of Tibetan monks came over and they saw, like, radically different, radically different things, you know, like all of the centers that had to do with positive growth were just like lit up and there was none of this conflict stuff because they spend their lives in service and in meditation and in the task of living simply and beautifully and peacefully and productively.

So that was a big, big, big revelation. And from there she has extracted a lot of the information that that derives from and then combined with the Journal Ladder, which is a piece of theory that I developed. Out of a need to have psychiatrically hospitalized trauma patients not retraumatize themselves in writing, I realized that most of them who reported difficulty with their journals. And the difficulty that they reported was that they, you know, retraumatized themselves in an attempt to understand and express their traumatic responses. They were all free writing. They were doing stream of consciousness writing, which is what most people do in the absence of a different idea. And I was amazed. I mean, it was immediately taken with how consistently they were describing the experience of free writing, which was that they would get to a certain point and then fall off the cliff and go into a traumatic response. So I thought, well, you know, free

writing has no structure, no pacing, no containment. That's why we call it free. That makes sense to me.

I teach a whole lot of techniques that have, you know, I haven't thought about them in this way before, but I thought. I have structured techniques. I have well-paced techniques. I have contained techniques. What are they, and I took all my techniques, wrote them on 3 by 5 cards, and organized them in a ladder. I call it a ladder, a sequential developmental structure where the highest structure, pacing and containment technique that I know is sentence stems "Right now now I feel ... Today I want... We talked about that for the reflection write. You just finish the sentence and you're done so well. Sure. Easy. Contained. And then it it gradually moves up from there. So why am I telling you this?

Claudia Scheidemann

The link to "Your brain on Ink" that's I think it's in there.

Kathleen Adams

Yes, you've been on it. Yes. So we incorporated. Yes. We incorporated the journal Ladder into "Your brain on Ink" and kind of talked about that through the lens of Deborahs' research, but what we came up with that is unique to "Your Brain on Ink" and it is a co-creation we, you know, kind of brainstormed this over a ZOOM call one day was that when you have, it's a three stage process: Intention, Attention, Action. So how ...when you are writing in a way that is conducive to positive brain change, the first thing to do is develop an intention. Right now I want to explore. And then so you set your intention, you know what you're focusing on you, you, you point your brain in the direction of something you want and you tell your brain, you announce it to your brain.

The second thing is attention having formed an intention, you then take your, your your attention to attention. You take your mind to the place where you can ask yourself curious questions or explore in a specific way. And Action. The action step then, is the reflection write in which you prescribe yourself some remedy that you can. The next step you can take. There's an action that needs to be, you know, you can write all day long, beautiful philosophical thoughts. And if you don't do anything about it, then you have written beautiful philosophical thoughts, which is great, but the action step is what really harnesses the energy and moves your brain on the faster track.

Claudia Scheidemann

Mhm. I use this action step also in in writing workshops and it's sometimes I say with the date. On November 5th I will ... whatever and this is when it gets a little bit uncomfortable most of the time, but people understand. Oh yeah, that's that's real now. It's not something, as you said, philosophical and and and and when when I started writing, I also did start with free writing as most people do and and that this action step and also to learn about others more structured methods really changed how how I approach writing and also how I teach it and and especially this, this, this. The the point you made with the ladder. Please choose your method according to what you want to achieve and that that that's really important.

Kathleen Adams

Yes, thank you. Yeah. And and again, I'm, I'm poorly interpreting Deborah's brilliance, but she is really, really, really smart and I I love working with her. And we also were really funny together. We have a good time when we teach together.

Claudia Scheidemann

He heard it through.

Kathleen Adams

Yeah, she's.

Claudia Scheidemann

Through the grapevine that there will be a second edition because the 1st edition is no longer available, so it's almost impossible to get the first one. So I have one of the rare things. So is that true that they're only the second one?

Kathleen Adams

Yeah, we. Oh, good, yes. It is coming up in the second edition. We're working on that. It's our fall project. We have. We have promised the editor that we have our revisions in by the end of the year and it'll come out sometime in 2026. [OK.] It'll be the 10th anniversary edition cause like, [Nice.] In 2016, so 10 years later. Yeah. Wow. Yeah, we've got some new some cool new things, including you want to talk about the four pillars of well-being?

Claudia Scheidemann

Oh, go ahead.

Kathleen Adams

OK, so there's some new science, some new research that was out I think in 2021, I think that. Um. The the team, part of the team that worked with the Dalai Lama, plus some other guys and a woman, did some more research on -back to neuroplasticity- about four qualities or or states of being. Well, first of all their...

Their bottom-line theory that the research confirmed, is that well-being is a skill and it can be learned. So well-being is not just a, you know, fate or, you know, brain chemistry, [a gift] or anything else. It's an actual learnable skill. And the four qualities or presences that or characteristics that they studied or learned or discerned from their studies that contribute that - Deborah says this so much better than I do- that place the brain in a readiness state for faster neural change are... Now let's see if I can remember them. Awareness. Connection. Insight and Purpose. And purpose is really purposes is because it's not just, you know, your one life purpose. It's your purpose of providing healthy food for your family so you cook dinner every night or the purpose of being a responsible informed citizen so you go to your politicians town-hall meetings.

Or you know, we all have little purposes and big purposes, but when you can focus your awareness, your connections, your insights and your purposes, individually or collectively and write in that direction. Then you have a greater chance of learning the skill of well-being. Teaching it to yourself and living at the positive effects of that.

And one of the books that's probably not available in Europe is a collection of 366 writing prompts, one for every day of the year, called "Journal therapy for Overcoming Burnout". And this was a COVID project that, yeah, you have it. Oh, yay,...

Claudia Scheidemann

That's available.

Kathleen Adams

It is available. Great. "Journal Therapy for Overcoming Burnout". During COVID I was asked by one of my publishers to write a 366 prompt book on burnout and I thought, wow, you know, we're all burned out, what a great idea. I gathered together and I was, you know, not able to my father-in-law was in the process of slowly dying, and was living with us. And you know, we had a lot of caregiving to do.

I I couldn't take on a burnout project by myself. So I recruited five of my friends who have specialty areas, Nancy Sherlon in Wellness, Deborah Ross in neuroplasticity. Leah Francisco in transitions. Carolyn Kenline in simplicity. Her specialty is clearing clutter as a healthy psychological act, so simplicity and Linda Barnes, who's big on metaphor, she's a poet, and she's big on metaphor and loves animals did animal prompts, so, you know, like the characteristics of mouse, for instance, and how mouse is really good at protecting him or herself by scuttling into a hole when, you know something disturbs it. So you know, what do you do to protect yourself is the prompt on that.

So Deborah did, and most of them, you know, I asked them each for X number of prompts. And I mixed them around and most people had about 30 or 35 prompts. Deborah and Leah, both the transitions person, both had weekly tracks that day three was always Leah. Day 4 was always Deborah, so there is and we were talking about this new research, the four pillars of well-being all the way through the book. I mean that that had just come out. And so it was brand new and we were articulating thinking on it for the first time. So throughout the book. There's like a 50 week crash course on attention, awareness, intention, connection and insight. I'm getting all my words mixed up. The four pillars of well-being are represented one at a time. Sorry, this is. That's not coming through. So yeah, so that is a little crash course in the four pillars of well-being. If if you want to do Day 4 for a year, well, you don't even have to spread them out over a week. You could do them, you know, in 52 days if you wanted. To I guess.

Claudia Scheidemann

Right. Yeah. So so we will put all the resources of course, in the show notes for the episode. So you can get all the titles and of the books and also where where you can get it while in Germany or Austria and and of course a question we we ask all our guests and it's a special thing to ask this question to you. OK is, is there any all time favorite writing prompt or writing exercise something you always fall back to or recommend? And I mean it's it's impossible to just name one probably but...

Kathleen Adams

Actually, there is one that I use for myself a lot and with my clients a lot and that is it's actually kind of a combination of two prompts. We've talked about sentence stems or or short questions as springboards, and there's one, and that is the lowest the sentence stem. Which can be turned

into an inverted question. You know, write now I want what do I want write now? Could be the question.

So sentence stems is the lowest rung of the journal ladder. The easiest, the most accessible, the fastest, the most convenient for most people, and the second rung on the journal ladder, is the 5 minute Sprint, which is just exactly like it sounds. It's 5 minutes by the clock or by the timer on your phone. When you write fast and you don't stop to think and I love the five minute Sprint because almost everybody, if I say to them, I know it's really busy, life and you got a lot going on and you don't have much time to journal. But do you think you could find 5 minutes once or twice a week and almost always they say yes.

So it's a convenient amount of time to write and when you are writing quickly and not thinking too much about it, you can get a lot done in 5 minutes, some of which isn't expected. We've talked about that before. So my favorite writing prompt that I use a lot is the question What's going on? What's happening? I mean, you know, which translates to. Where am I right now or what? What's everything that I'm stressed about? You know, what's going on? I'm really stressed. I'm really stressed. I'm really stressed about this, this, this, this, this and this. Or whatever.

So what's going on? 5 minutes by the clock. Bam. 5 minutes later, I almost always, especially after I take another 90 seconds or so to read back, don't take long to read back 5 minutes. And, you know, make an action plan, attention, intention and intention. I'm going to write for 5 minutes about what's going on. Attention, I do it action. I harvest the insight and take the next. Step. So that's my go to writing prompt for myself and also for a lot of people.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah. Thank you. So that's the Catherine Adams approved go-to writing prompt from now on to and and what's also I mean in in your case the to be read pile of books is already rising with all your publications. But is there a favorite book that you would recommend? Or can be writing related but doesn't have to but ...

Kathleen Adams

Yeah. I really love Ira Progoff, who I consider to be the founder of journal therapy. Even though he may not identify himself that way, he since deceased, he wrote a book called "At a Journal Workshop" which is a download of what happens in the intensive Journal Workshop that Ira Progoff started in 1966 offered to the public for the first time in 1966. Doctor Progoff is known and he was adept psychologist. He studied in Switzerland and Zurich with Doctor Carl Jung on many occasions and he wrote he was a depth psychologist himself. An analytic psychologist, he had this crazy idea at the time that maybe people didn't need to be in psychiatric analysis for 20 years. Maybe they could solve their own problems by writing. [Crazy.] Developed what he called a set of practical procedures.

They were journal techniques that would help people understand their own unconscious, interpret their own dreams, really radical in the 50s and 60s, when he was developing this work and he got a lot of pushback for it. But it is the most beautiful, powerful, spiritual writing process I have ever experienced. I have done the Progoff Intensive Journal Workshop multiple times and every time I come out of it awed with how brilliant he was and how important his work is. If I were on a desert island, I would want and only have one book. I would want lots of paper and lots of pens and "At a Journaling Workshop" because there's unlimited depth, you can go to and

unlimited spiritual awareness you can develop and it's just it's hard to read. It's it's dense. It's kind of loopy, but it's beautiful language and if you stay with it, that's why I would want to be on a desert island because normally I wouldn't read it straight through because it's hard to read. I do it.

He does have- the organization has workshops on ZOOM all over the world really. So you can take a workshop on a, you know, from on a video call with a with a certified. He calls them journalcConsultants, certified journal consultant. But it's it's not an easy read.

For an easy read. Let's see what do I love? I love "Journal to the Self" of course. But I honestly, really love Christina Baldwin and another spiritually oriented. But Christina Baldwin's "Lifes Companion". It's just a beautiful book stuffed with lovely prompts on all kinds of topics that just help us get through life. "Lifes Companion" and and I assumed when I saw the title that she would mean the journal is your lifes companion, but what she actually means is consciousness is your lifes companion, and this book is about writing to develop consciousness.

Claudia Scheidemann

Oh.

Michaela Muschitz

And again, a new book on the big pile we already have.

Kathleen Adams

Good.

Claudia Scheidemann

Thank you so much for the, for the, for the book tips also.

Michaela Muschitz

Looking at the clock, we really spent a marvelous time with you. Since I love to listen your to your ideas and what you already did and I'm very, very happy to, to have spent time with you and to learn from you. And we already talked in Salzburg that we are sure that it was not the last time we brought you to Europe. So we will do that again and I'm really happy to to start planning with you when we can do that and.

Kathleen Adams

I would love that.

Michaela Muschitz

Of course, we already thought about asking Deborah Ross for this podcast.

Kathleen Adams

Your listeners will love her. She's so smart. She's so fun. She's just a really great. She's a wonderful.

Michaela Muschitz

She's brilliant.

Kathleen Adams

Yes, she will not disappoint you.

Michaela Muschitz

No, definitely not. So thanks a lot for the time and thanks a lot for your ideas and wish you all the best for your work. Happy you will go on and inspiring all of us for our journal work.

Kathleen Adams

Well, it has been a pleasure and a privilege to be with you. I so respect the work that you are doing both with the personal writing community and with your very successful podcast. It's so exciting and I'm just delighted to be a part of the Austria and German writing community.

Kathleen Adams

So thank you for that. I wear my personal writing community T-shirt every day.

Claudia Scheidemann

Wow.

Michaela Muschitz

Thanks a lot.

Claudia Scheidemann

Thank you very, very much.

Kathleen Adam

Thank you.