

“Wellbeing is a skill that can be learned”

Season 3 – Episode 3 – Guest: Deborah Ross

Transcript

Claudia Scheidemann

Welcome to another episode of our Podcast 'Ink and Courage' or in German Tinte und Courage. And we are really happy, really proud and I'm a little bit nervous to have Deborah Ross as our guest today.

She's one of the leading figures in Journaling and one of the pioneers who developed basic journaling methods we use almost in every course. And she's a certified journal therapist and has retired from private practice psychotherapy to focus more on teaching journaling in healthcare, meditation, and also community settings. She's a core faculty member and supervisor at the Therapeutic Writing Institute.

And something I like the way you express that, you are interested in how the brain's experience of wellbeing can be used to guide writing and other practices in service of flourishing and our collective wellbeing. This is definitely something we will talk about.

And of course, you are together with Kathleen Adams, the author of “Your Brain on Ink”. And this makes you, for me, really the sort of say person who connects two of my main interests, neuroscience and journaling. So this will obviously be the focus of our discussion today. And yeah, we start like with all of our guests with the question, what does personal writing or journaling mean for you personally write now?

Deborah Ross

Write now. It's a way for me to check in with myself, to have clarity about where I am in my life, where I am in the moment. It's a way for me to settle my nervous system, you know, living in the US, especially in the DC Metro area. My nervous system is on fire constantly. So it's a way for me to quiet my nervous system such that I can be more effective throughout my day. It also helps me set intention about what I want to be doing, how I want to show up in the world, and how I imagine my doing that might possibly be a benefit to others. So, you know, sometimes it's writing serves to help me digest stuff that's left over. Sometimes it helps me sort of plan and anticipate the next meal, if you will. And with whom do I want to share that?

Claudia Scheidemann

Oh, that's also an interesting aspect. So do you read your writings or is it more about what you found in your writing and then talk about? So finding the write words or words at all in your writing before you talk about something.

Deborah Ross

What I do is I do my writing and pretty much the only rule, if you will, I don't even want to call it that, is I always do a reflection write. I always, you know, leave that space, go back, read what I

wrote, and then reflect on it. I'm taking myself out of whatever emotional system I might have been in when I'm doing my writing.

And I read it through a space of witnessing and observing. And that then, it's more like the view from 30,000 feet than being on the ground in the weeds. And that then helps me get some clarity about how I want to take this forward. Because when I'm steeped in it, you know, and I might be, Then now I can get the clarity I can hopefully have some wisdom about what went on the page. So.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, I like that you put it in the way that journaling doesn't prevent being , but that it helps to digest when this happens. Because sometimes it's like journaling as a cure all and you will always feel serene and great. And I don't think that this is even possible.

Deborah Ross

I don't know who put that myth out in the world, but from where I said, that's myth.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah. Yeah, it's really what you just said, the important part of writing is to go or to check in with oneself by a reflection write. Are there other elements where you would say that's elements of a journal entry that you would recommend or is it write and reflection write?

Deborah Ross

I'm not sure to understand the question exactly.

Claudia Scheidemann

Oh, sorry. So are there important elements of a journal entry besides the reflection write?

Deborah Ross

Oh, yeah, date the page.

Claudia Scheidemann

That's simple.

Deborah Ross

Yeah, that's it. Because I do have meditation experience, you know, when I, and I do write by hand, before I start writing, I usually will take three deep breaths with my exhale longer than my inhale. I want to feel like I'm arriving. I want to feel like I'm showing up on the page. And so, or I might just pause and, you know, feel what the pen feels like in my hand. I want to get connected to my body.

Because there is a line from, it's a James Joyce short story that's in the Dubliners, and I'm paraphrasing it a little bit, but Mr. Duffy lived a short distance from his body. I was raised that way, so. If I want to get some cues and clues about what's happening, my mind can be in the future, my mind can be in the past, but my body is in real time. So I want to be bringing my body

to the page. And so I can do that by my breath. I can do that by noticing what it feels like to have the pen in my hand. Am I gripping it this morning or the section or whenever I'm writing is my grip, not so grippy.

So I always do a little bit of that before I pick up the pen. I mean, sometimes I do have my moments where I am just mmm, and I grab that pen and I can, I don't usually puncture the page, but close. But then my reflection write will pick that up. Honey, look what you just did here. Same with all kindness. So yeah, but date the page, that's it.

Claudia Scheidemann

You know, what I find always interesting is to look at how my writing looks like. So sometimes I don't even have to look at what I wrote, but just how I wrote. And if it was easy and gliding over the page or just in a more tougher way, so to say. And this tells so much as well. So it's not just, and I like that, it's more kind of a practice so that it's mark beginning and mark an end with a reflection write. And I think that's generally, I think, a good idea to do things to mark beginnings and end and not that everything just flows together.

Deborah Ross

I don't know that there's any, you know, to the best of my knowledge, there's been no study about this stuff in the writing world. But I As I got to know more about our DNA chromosomes, and at the ends are the telomeres, which as we aged, get kind of fragile, and there are all sorts of things that we can do to keep them healthier and more robust. But I think of those telomeres as bookending a chromosome. So I just think of how am I bookending the things that I do. I have no idea if that's of any benefit to my chromosome. I don't believe I'm doing any harm. Look at it.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah. Yeah, that's a nice metaphor. And I think, I mean, I've recently read about someone who actually talks to their cells and is full of gratitude and that helps her feeling alive and just feeling better. And I think whatever works.

Deborah Ross

Exactly, exactly.

Claudia Scheidemann

Kind of of trial and error probably.

Deborah Ross

The whatever works for me is, I've heard a number of people, I believe including Jamie Pennebaker, you know, who started all the research on all this, say this. And it's something that I do say in all of my classes and groups and whatever is, to please treat yourself as an experiment of one. Only you know what is happening as a function of your writing.

And no matter what I say and what I recommend or anybody else says or all the journaling systems out there, please honor your own integrity with this process and treat yourself as an experiment of one. Use the reflection write to track it. Your reflection write might say, oh, this

was not for me this morning. And I want to note that because I might, under other circumstances, want to come back.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, I mean, it's also that's also one of my experiences that when I also usually do the reflection write, and that the main thing that did not appear in the writing as such, but in the reflection write, and then I understood what it was about. So that's.

Michaela Muschitz

And sometimes the reflection write even takes more time and is longer than the actual writing.

Deborah Ross

It didn't go there, but exactly, exactly. And I think if you want to be sort of reflective about a period of time, the last six months, year, whatever it happens to be, I also think that going back and reading those reflection writes, and then you can decide, do I want to actually read that day's entry? But I think you get that perspective, you get that more panoramic view. If you are reading those reflection writes. And I think it's, I don't want to say, I was going to say alert, but I don't mean that in a, you know, jarring way. I'm noticing I have longer reflection writes on these days, or so it's a reflection on the reflection. And that can also give you some very valuable information.

Claudia Scheidemann

But what interests me is, of course, how did your connection between neuroscience and journaling? How did this happen?

Deborah Ross

There is a meditation teacher in the US, but I imagine he is known around the world. His name is Jack Cornfield. And he and a psychiatrist named Dan Siegel, Dr. Dan Siegel, and Jack is actually a clinical psychologist. And he and Jack and Dan met, and they began conversations about neuroscience and meditation and, you know, the brain and what's happening. And they came to the DC Metro area in 2008 to do a weekend training for therapists. And I went.

And that was one of those game-changing moments. And Dan had been in the process of creating what is essentially a brand-new field known as interpersonal neurobiology. And a couple of years later, he offered a, he started doing trainings, but you had to go out to Los Angeles every month. I was not commuting from D.C. to L.A. every month, that was not happening. And at some point, though, a couple years later, he decided to create an online version, and it was a pilot. And it actually ran for three years, and I enrolled and I completed all three years. And that was the real game changer for me with the neuroscience.

As it happened, I ended up, Kay [Kathleen Adams] had come through town to offer a one day training for therapists in journal writing. Because when I was in graduate school, often we were told, have your clients journal about that. And I had clients, I would suggest it, and they would sometimes come back and go, no, no, no, it's not working for me. And it was very, very mixed. And there was no instruction really, write about that. You'll feel better. You'll get it out. Not always, actually rarely. So Kay came through town, did one day training for therapists on the

journal ladder and sort of a conceptualization of writing and structure, pacing, containment, all those kinds of things. So I did that one day training. And I thought, actually I did it twice. Little secret here. And I honestly do not know what possessed me. And I used the more possessed intentionally. But I decided to enroll in the therapeutic writing institute's journal therapy training program. And I was overlapping with Dan.

Claudia Scheidemann

Okay.

Deborah Ross

So I had it all going on at the same time. Honestly, why I decided to do that. I mean, I had a full-time practice. I had a lot of this stuff going on. I had, yeah. But yeah, so that's where it was, because I had overlap. And now things were, they were just clicking and bubbling and fermenting. And it was a mess on the page. It was a mess on the screen. So yeah, that's what happened.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, we are very grateful that that happened that time overlap. So that these two worlds of ideas could touch in your brain and to really develop this concept of writing with the brain in mind. I'm not even sure if we can translate that to German because it's different meaning words. So what does it mean for you? How would you define it? What are the main points by writing with the brain in mind and connecting also this to this experience of well-being of the brain.

Deborah Ross

To me, writing with the brain in mind means that you've gotten your owner's manual. And it's the, you know, sort of the brief intro because I am not a neuroscientist. I am adapting and translating it, you know, as I understand it. Is if you know how your brain works, you are likely to have the outcomes that you desire. That if, I mean, this notion of neuroplasticity, for example, back up until the late 80s or so, we thought you were born with a fixed number of neurons. The only thing that happens is they die. That's it. I mean, that's the only change that it's going to happen.

Then all of a sudden, we discovered that your brain is constantly changing in response to experience. I find that a very useful piece of information to know. **Because people sometimes assume that neuroplasticity is a positive concept. It isn't. It's a neutral concept. Your brain is changing in response to experience. Full stop.** What are the experiences? If you want to spend a lot of time ruminating, or if you are unintentionally spending a lot of time ruminating, your brain is changing and is changing in response to all that rumination. If you're focusing on other things that maybe are more positive, more affirming, help you move through something instead of getting stuck with it, if you understand how and why you might get stuck, then you have the keys to be able to unlock processes that can help you get unstuck and then move on in a direction that you would like.

So I think of it as, if you have this just as basic intro, owner's manual, about what's happening up here, recognizing that a lot of this research is in its infancy. So anything I say today might have add-ons tomorrow or new takeaways tomorrow then I think that's a very important thing that you can use to guide your writing. So for example, so many people are doing gratitude journals.

Grateful for this and that, grateful for the other thing, right? And what we have learned is, and you both have probably heard me say this, that the brain registers the absence of a negative as a negative. So people are diligently, dutifully, doing their gratitude journals. I'm grateful that I didn't have an angry conversation with my teenager today. I'm grateful that I wasn't distressed today. I mean, they're doing all the stuff. And if you know that your brain does not register that as a positive, it latches onto those negative words, throws out the qualifiers.

So maybe you're a little bit better off, but nowhere nearly as much as you would imagine. And the embodied since, check in. If you say, I'm grateful I didn't have an angry conversation with my teenager or my boss or my partner, what happens in your body? If you say, I'm grateful that I had a conversation with my teenager that had ease or flow, you check in with your body, you notice the difference right away. So if you know that then you can use your writing with, and I think this is the word, much greater agency. You're giving that pen and page, yeah, you're coming at it with much greater agency, more tools, and they'll be more effective.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, that's something that for me is a key factor really in making, as you said, journaling more effective and create more agency for myself and even create a greater freedom of how can I act because I have more possibilities. And I think a grateful journals or gratitude journals are a great example how misunderstandings in the field can appear because it's something that is easily prescribed and it does not work for all people. So we had some conversations around that already in other episodes too. But I think it's important to point out together with what you said earlier, find your own way and then put the user manual for your brain also into consideration.

And one of the concepts I found extremely useful, and I almost always in every workshop talk about it, is this idea of the brain is velcro for the bad stuff and Teflon for the good stuff. Write. And this is something that sticks as a picture and people understand What is meant because it's an experience I think we can all relate to.

Deborah Ross

Yeah, and it speaks to two things. One is that neuroscience principle. And because of that Velcro Teflon metaphor, if you're doing gratitude journals, so presumably you're writing about positive things here. And we've learned a lot more about this, too. We've also learned that it's better to have one well crafted, one in a week than this daily recitation. I mean, every day I could say I'm grateful that my grandkids are, you know, yeah, of course. And after a while, you're just kind of phoning that in, as we say in the states. So if you, because of the Velcro Teflon thing, Your brain wants to know, okay fine, you have this gratitude, why should I store that? I'm giving you real estate for all your survival skills. Why do you need real estate for something positive?

You have to add a line of meaning. You have to tell the brain why you would like it to store this. Why does that particular gratitude, why is that meaningful for you? The three of us can name the same thing and each of us will have a different reason for why you know, it's meaningful. So meaning is really important. The other thing is we've learned a lot about metaphors. There was an article I actually about 10 years ago or so about your brain on metaphors. Your brain loves efficiency and metaphors, they're efficient. I mean, you said to yourself, like Velcro and Tello, most folks know what that is. And you get that visual and that embodied sense and you can feel

that stickiness of the velcro, you know, grabbing onto something. And the, you know, smooth slide of, you know, here go the positive things right on through.

And so that is another piece that is really important to know. And it's totally fine to write about difficult, dramatic, traumatic, troubling things that are, you know, we sometimes say are producing churn and burn. Totally fine to do that. And then is, what do you want to do with this? How do you want to engage with this on the page? What gives you agency? There, Sharon Salzburg, who was another, at least in the state's very well-known meditation teacher, says, you don't meditate to get better at meditation. You meditate to get better at life. And I look at journaling like that as well. I mean, this is naval gazing or pen gazing in service of what?

Claudia Scheidemann

And I think that's really an important thing to also add on, why do I write? What's my intention? So it's not necessarily every time I put pen to paper, but in general, what do I want to achieve with personal writing, what's my not goal, but what's the general direction? What do I want to use this tool for? And it's not, as you said, OK to fill notebook after notebook.

Michaela Muschitz

I can remember in one of your workshops you said neuroplasticity and journaling brings you back in the driver's seat. And I love this quote because that's, really, I so often think about this quote because in most of our lives, we are so pushed from so many different things that we do have the feeling this is not my life. I'm drawn to so many sides. And coming back to journal is for me like, what's going on right now? What do I need right now? What do I feel right now? This is bringing me my life back so I can work on it, manage it, be happy, hopefully. But without it, I would be drawn to so many different spaces from people, what they think I should do, what would be good for me, those things. And I really love this quote from you.

Deborah Ross

Oh, thank you. I mean, I use that. Sometimes I also use an image of a sailboat being buffeted by the wind.

Michaela Muschitz

Right.

Deborah Ross

And it's grabbing the rudder, grabbing and learning how to sail, learning how to catch the wind. And I think also important from the sailboat end of things, knowing when to drop anchor. Yeah, knowing to stay put. And also from a reflection write, helping me pay attention to language, especially in terms of being buffeted so much by you know, expectations, world events, you know, it can be, you know, personal crises that are happening work, whatever it happens to be, is that: What verbs am I using? And in the here in the US, we're *working* on something. We're always *working* on something. I think we live at least here in the land of relentless self-improvement. And I'm not even clear whose agenda that is and what, you know. So, if I'm constantly in this land of relentless self-improvement and I'm working on things, what would happen if I switch that verb to, *I'm exploring this*, I am *playing* with this. Energetically, what is

happening in my body when I switch that verb? One of my writing students said to me recently, I think *I'm gonna swim with it*.

Claudia Scheidemann

That's nice.

Deborah Ross

You know, so here she was imagining that these were dolphins, and she was swimming with these dolphins, you know, on the page. I'm going to dance with it. What happens? And the reflection write can give you that information about what emerged with the same topic, same topic, and you changed the verb. Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

I think that's it's almost kind of word magic for me, that one thing that I had also recently a conversation where it was about trying new things and learning new things. And it was just the switch to I learned this right now. And it was no longer a terrible task on my to-do list, but because that would mean I have to do it and of course in the right way, right from the start. But it was allowing myself, yeah, I can learn what is what I have to do, or making an experiment with something. And I mean, I'm also a scientist in a way that I'm a trained pharmacist. So for me, it's facts. And it was really a surprise how much power, a single or simple change of words can have, really. It's amazing, and to explore that on the page it's really a thing for me now.

Deborah Ross

Yeah, I mean, what would happen if? we finish this conversation or you know I don't want to take a break but it's like what happens if we work to dance with our time together? What would that look like on the page instead *we're working on this*? And I do use the word work. I love my work and it's a fine word. And I think there are lots of other dimensions that can be explored. And I look at it also as, you know, if you think about a kaleidoscope, right? And you, you know, the tiles and the stones that are in there, each shift of the word is turning that kaleidoscope. So it's the same stuff and it's a different pattern.

Michaela Muschitz

Beautiful picture.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah.

Deborah Ross

So, and you know, you asked about, you know, well-being or, you know, there's a whole concept of flourishing. I mean, the neuroscience research has established that *well-being is a skill that can be learned*. I mean, that's really radical. It's not like you're born into the world and you're either this way or that way in terms of what your well-being is going to look like. We are certainly born with capacities. We are born with the capacity for kindness, much like language capacities, and things do need to get nurtured. They're not. You can certainly see that neurologically. But

plasticity seems to exist until the end of your life. So there are certainly opportunities all the way along the way, you know, to continue to shift things in directions that you want.

But if you, this notion that well-being is a skill, a skill, how do you use the pen and page in service of that? And there are four pillars. The nomenclature has changed. So the current version, which was established couple years ago. It's awareness, connection, insight, and purpose. If you see the word resilience, that's the old nomenclature, and resilience is seen now more as an outcome of these four -awareness insight, connection and purpose. And so, you know, you can also think of your journal as how, you know, the area of my life that I want to do more exploration around is connection. So how am I going to, what kind of writing is going to be in support of that? You know, awareness is always important. But purpose is a very interesting concept because at least here we talk about purpose. I need to find my purpose.

Claudia Scheidemann

The one and only.

Deborah Ross

One and only. And it's out there somewhere and I'm on a dedicated, you know, mission to find it out there, I don't know, under some log or whatever. And the neuroscience supports the notion that we have multiple purposes and that, you know, the meaning in our life is also expressed, you know, via these purposes. And so it's many of them small p. And so how do I use my journal to explore these purposes? And these are already operational. They're just below the surface.

So if you have an inquiry about why am I purchasing this particular food item, and it's from a place of kind, compassionate Why. It's not that, you know, I'm not interrogating myself. I'd be careful by that energy, right. It's easy for me to do that. Why am you doing that? I can drop into that very quickly.

So, you know, why? Why? Why? What is the meaning behind that particular purchase? Or what is the meaning behind the fact that we're gathered together the three of us today? You know, what is the meaning there? And those are really important things because we are learning that longevity actually does have a link to the expression of those purposes, particularly in an intentional way, because they're happening anyway.

Claudia Scheidemann

And what you're just saying is these explorations, that's for me a different kind of writing or journaling than just I have to get all out. Sometimes this is helpful, but I find for myself more and more, so it's also something that is shifting a bit, that It's much more beneficial to set, yeah, even, yeah, why do I write and know what am I doing right now? And that is something different than just, yeah, well, I just write down what's going on right now. I mean, they are linked, they are linked, and I think I might need both, but especially in times when it feels challenging or, well, I have a tendency to ruminate, then to write with purpose, slightly better results. Let's put it this way.

Deborah Ross

It also speaks to a certain, you know, once you start getting more steeped in the world of journaling, you realize that there is, there are lots of techniques, you know, you know, Ira Progoff and, you know, Kathleen Adams, you know, mentor to so many of us. And how do you stack them? I mean, most of us, what we know is that stream of consciousness rage on the page. Fine, that's great.

And there is so much more out there. So there are so many different techniques, and then you can learn how to stack them. You can do a rage on the page, and then you can say to yourself, so what quality do I want to invite more of in my life as a companion through all this raging on the page? And maybe I do a character sketch of her doesn't have to, you know, have female energy, sometimes it's animal energy, sometimes it's just sort of general energy. But maybe what I need is I would benefit from bringing more curiosity to the situation. So I do a character sketch of curiosity. Who is she? And my curiosity in the past couple of years when I've written about her, some things stay pretty stable. She drives. But her license in the U.S., you can have what they call vanity plates. You know, you can make up your own. So her vanity plate says, WHY? She likes to go to restaurants that have tasting menus.

Claudia Scheidemann

Interesting.

Deborah Ross

And she ... Although she drives, she also happens to really like public transit because she likes to people watch. So, you can then turn this quality. Maybe I need more trust, maybe I need more curiosity, maybe I would benefit from more kindness or whatever. You do the character scetch. Now you can have a relationship that is intentional with this quality and you can engage with that quality on the page. You can have dialogues. You can ask them. You can write a letter to them. You can have them write a letter to you. And this goes way beyond, you know, the usual just, okay, here we go. And I think again, you know, it gives you much more agency puts you back in the driver's seat. You know, it makes it possible for you to grab that rudder. And again, also know when to put the pen down, drop anchor, an office for now.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, what you just said, I think it's also really helpful in the context of what is going on in the world right now. I mean, you mentioned in the U.S., it feels like it's everywhere something bad is happening. And I think for a lot of us, me also, there are big emotions that are stirred up. And I find it, I'm struggling to deal with them really in journaling because the issues seem so big. So maybe these character sketches can help, or do you have any other advice probably what a technique could help when you really have this strong urgent emotions and how do I go through them on the page.

Deborah Ross

So, the technique that I use, and I've been using it a lot, is the cluster. I mean, we something's called the mind map here as well, but I know it more as the cluster, where you put something, you draw a circle in the center of the page, and you put something in the center of that circle that

is live for you, and you can do this about anything, anything, but in response to the current state of the world here.

So some particular issue, you know, maybe it's, I don't know, reproductive rights, immigration, you know, whatever we've got that's got us churn and burn. And then you'll let all the associations spring out with the little bubbles, right? And so that way, you get some information on the page. But because you are in the boundary of these bubbles that you're creating, yeah, you're not ... This stuff is not spilling out page. You can have a cluster go into more than one page, but it's not so many words. You're not dropping into so much story.

You also then can see relationships between things. When I thought about this and this is your brain, neurons that fire together, wire together. So, you see this circuit, beget that, beget that. And then there's often a moment where you feel like, okay, I'm done for at least for now. I mean, there's an embodied sense of, okay, this is finished. Usually, for me, it takes less than 10 minutes, so I'm not committing, like, you know, a big block of time here. Now I see relationships between things. I have information on the page. There may well be feelings on the page as well. And I can choose if I want to focus on a section of it. Everything else is safely in the parking lot.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, that's also a nice, nice picture to have a parking lot where I can store or park for a while. All this big stuff. Yeah.

Deborah Ross

Yeah. And then I was the reflection write about the cluster, which then may give me some information about how I want to proceed. Maybe I just want to leave it alone for now. Maybe I want to focus on this particular area. And one of the things in the reflection write that I think is important is people usually think about it is, okay, so you know, having read this, what I'm noticing, what I'm aware of, I asked myself, what am I curious about? What intrigues me? What has touched me? I mean, these are the questions I'm asking my reflection, write. I'm also looking not only for what showed up on the page, but what didn't that I expected.

Claudia Scheidemann

Hmm, yeah. That's an interesting twist.

Deborah Ross

Yeah, and often that's quite revelatoric.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, I like the idea of having kind of a confined space or a technique that confines this, so it doesn't bubble over too much and spill over in, I don't know, two hours of writing about how bad the world is, but it's more about, as you said, collecting information.

Deborah Ross

Yeah, oh yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

Getting new ideas.

Deborah Ross

Yes, and what ... and I'm often looking at my writing with an eye toward... The metaphor that has really become important to me over recent years is 'composting'. And it's very much about how am I transforming. And I got all this stuff, you know, sort of the coffee grounds and the eggshells of my life here. How are they being transformed? And a respect for how organic that process is. Because I think, you know, at least here in the US, we're used to pushing things. We're used to, you know, just that effort.

This is an organic process and it's going to unfold, you know, in its own time. And this compost has meaning to the extent that I use it to grow and nurture something else. Otherwise, all I'm left with is this big pile. It may be transformed. It may not smell. But so what? So what? That's the big pile of my art. So what am I going to nurture with this? What am I going to grow with this?

And I look at my journal as, all right, I'm composting all sorts of stuff here. And what am I going to grow with it? What am I going to nurture with it? And I mean, the notion too of community, who might I do that with? I mean, who might I offer this to? And it's also, who are my colleagues? Who is the community that I share this with? And how do we support one another? So how can my compost nurture you? How can yours nurture me? And how do we [Compost switch] Yeah, you know, do this in service of what?

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, I like the idea of, again, this doing something on purpose and not just let things happen, but take my time and decide consciously. Not out of the spur of a moment. I think intuition is really important. But also to sit back a while and wait, basically.

Deborah Ross

Yes, yes.

Claudia Scheidemann

And the previous version of me, let's say probably 5, 6, 7 years ago, she would say, yeah. Right! Sure!

Deborah Ross

Waiting.

Claudia Scheidemann

Sure. You're the person for that, exactly.

Deborah Ross

We know each other... Right. And I mean, you mentioned intuition. I mean, one of the things that Dan Siegel talked about, and this as evolved over the years, is that, yes, we have this brain in our

skull, and we have a heart brain, and we have a gut brain, and the fourth brain that's been named now is the relational brain.

So yeah, we, okay, we may have more. I have no idea. Next year, we could be talking about six, but when we think about the brain and the fact that all of these, talk to one another and this is an integrated system. I mean, these are names that are implying sort of demarcations that are not quite as demarcated as the name would imply, is do I need to check in with my heart brain?

Do I need to check in with my gut brain or the relational brain? And what is all that about? And the ways that our brains coregulate with one another. And I think that that's an important thing. And I was reading, it's 'Travelers to Unimaginable Lands'. I think is the title. I hope I didn't really butcher that. And she was talking about the struggles that caregivers have, I mean, paid caregivers, but particularly loved ones when the person that they are caring for is cognitively impaired, slipping into, you know, one form of dementia or another. And how one part of the distress is that our brains are constantly attempting to coregulate with one another. What happens if that person is no longer coregulatable with? So one of the things that's been on my mind more recently is how might one use one's journal to help in your own coregulation process.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah. Oh, that's interesting.

Deborah Ross

And I don't know. I'm just beginning. I'm just beginning to explore this. Play with what might this look like. Yeah. And it's also, though, you know, in that relational brain and, you know, you know, heart and gut and whatever, it's, you know, what are the skills that this community has? You know, you know, some of the folk like, you know, Kay and my good friend, Elaine Brooks, they're both poetry therapists as well.

And I did a workshop this summer at the cancer center where I taught to journaling and I did it with an art therapist. What happens when, you know, several people come together to offer something, make this as the whole is greater than the sum of the parts? And which speaks to that thing that Dan talks about, which is being differentiated *and* linked.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah.

Deborah Ross

And it's not but, it's not differentiated but linked. It's differentiated **and** linked. Yeah. So the integrity of our respective disciplines coming together in service of linkage and that linkage is in service of something greater than all of us.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah. And I think there's a lot of synergies in just yesterday I had a a discussion with somebody from Improv Theatre, and we're planning to do a workshop together. So Improv and journaling. So we are looking forward. What will happen there? I think there was many, many, yeah, things that are similar enough so that we can easily connect. And it's like, yeah, developing a scene on

the page probably. So, we played around a lot and I'm really excited. I think that's also a way to go to see where can we connect to disciplines which seem, huh, what does theatre and journaling? How do you bring these two together?

And yeah, it was easy because we could see the things we had in common in our approaches to developing a scene or developing a text, or however, telling a story. Basically, it's about storytelling. And there are thousands of different ways how to do that. And I really like that about the writing community. And I think it's, I don't know, it's this kind of openness, maybe because of a lot of reflection taking place. That's a guess word, I don't know, but to be open to new ideas, basically. And what can we do with writing?

Deborah Ross

What can we do with it? And how can we bring curiosity? I mean, when you said the improv was like, oh, I want to sign up for that. It's probably going to be in German and I don't think.

Claudia Scheidemann

I think both of us speak English so.

Deborah Ross

So I thought about I did some workshops for a while with someone who is a pretty renowned knitter, spinner, pattern design. And then I did a weekend retreat with someone who is pretty renowned weaver. I mean, so what's the warp in your life? What's the weft? How much permission do you have to bring color in? What happens when you don't follow the rules or the pattern? And you can bring so many, you know, fabulous questions to the page that are being sparked by the other person's discipline.

Michaela Muschitz

I was laughing out so loud because that's exactly the idea I had two weeks ago because I'm a knitter and I'm a writer. And I love both. And I do see that there are so many things that come together. And I love when I'm thinking about something. And I feel that now I cannot write, then I do knit. And then suddenly I know what to write. So, we all, I discussed already with Claudia and two other ladies I know, and they were like, what do you want to do? Write and knit. And I was, yes, yes, there's so many things that will work out together so perfectly. And I'm really now I'm working out a weekend workshop for writers and knitters and just to show them the other side of.

Deborah Ross

Well, I was going to mention this earlier but I thought, no I'll just leave that alone, was talking about writing and raging on the page. Because I'm a knitter, part of how I gauge, how the intensity of my writing is, is this going to impact my knitting? Because my hand is going to be stiffer. [That's interesting.] I've done my, I've taught all my kids to knit. I have all my kids are they're late 40s, late 30s into 40s. I taught him all to knit. Two of them still do. My youngest son owns the yarn shop. Oh, it's very bad over here. He's not local. So I, but I have done, when I've gone up to visit him, he's in up state New York near the Canadian border. I have done a writing workshop for his knitting people. And it was so much fun. I mean, let's think of all of the possibilities in writing of the metaphor of a gauge swatch.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah.

Michaela Muschitz

Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

I love this. I'm a knitter, too by the way.

Deborah Ross

So yes, I think, yes, and it's very, I think also, I mean, we've laughed this morning. I think that's also important is where is the humor? I mean, there is so much angst that we can pour on the page. It's also reminding ourselves, you know, to laugh, which may or may not happen when we're writing alone, but sometimes in community, it, you know, it brings that up. And look for those places where there's spark, there's that, Oh yeah!

Michaela Muschitz

Claudia and I are both very, very big fans from your book, *Your Brain on Ink*, which is not available in Europe, no longer. But we know that you are working on a second edition. Is that right?

Deborah Ross

That is correct. We actually, we got the official word, I think it was Friday, that it was approved. It's been a long process in part because the original publisher was acquired. And then, so we had, and there's a long editorial review thing, but yeah, as of Friday, we got the word and I saw that the agreement letter just landed in my inbox. So I have to go through it with Kay, but well, we're on board to do it.

What I hope is that the new publisher is Bloomsbury, and they are, yeah, because they're UK based, I don't know if that will make it easier for you to get. But yeah, I can always, I can always get it and I can always ship it. I'm a regular at the post office. And I was shipping... Somebody from India requested it and sent me the address and I looked at that address. I thought, there's no way. This is ridiculous. I mean, and I said, and then I took it to the post office and it happened that the woman behind the counter would had been born and raised in India. She goes, Finally, somebody knows how to address a package going to India.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, well, I think we're very much looking forward to that new edition and getting our hands on it. I mean, it's just, it's really, really hard to get one copy.

Deborah Ross

So, well, it's been part of this here now. I mean, I looked recently, and I'm not sure, yeah, but again, I don't have, I mean, I think I sent you all the last of my stash, and I'm seeing that it's not at the moment easily available here, but yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

I think that's good news for Bloomsbury, I think. So, yeah. - Are there any other projects in the making you would like to let us know about.

Deborah Ross

Well, the project that you all probably know about is the one that Kay and I and Birgit [Schreiber] are doing. And we are steeped in that. The manuscript in reasonably type form is supposed to be submitted at the end of April. So I don't know what the publication date is, but that will come out in German before it comes out in English.

Claudia Scheidemann

Okay.

Deborah Ross

Yeah, so we'll be on the receiving end of it. And I think, you know, one of the things about Zoom, of course, you know, because you know, we all have been together before, is that possibility of doing things, you know, across all of these miles. And I think that that is something that we, you know, I'm always willing to explore and you know, I've done workshops with people all over the place, which is lovely for me because I learned so much from the questions. One of the things about TWY, the Journal Therapy Writing Institute, is because I have always taught in the online wing of things, my students have come from around the world. That's how I met Birgit. And so the questions the people from South Korea and Egypt and South Africa and Croatia that are on their minds. There's overlap and they're different. And I think that keeps us all stretched in that flexible, adaptive way. So, I think that's just important.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah. And it's also, speak to the idea of connection with other people on the other end of the world. So that's right.

Michaela Muschitz

One question all our guests do you get is what's your favorite writing prompt or your favorite way of writing?

Deborah Ross

How is the weather inside me right now?

Michaela Muschitz

Oh, I love that.

Deborah Ross

I mean, there's the curiosity, there's the awareness, There's the embodied check-in. And it also gives you that chance to check in with how you layer. To the outside world, it looks like all is sunny, however.

Claudia Scheidemann

On the horizon. Yeah, it's again one of these really nice metaphors we can use to describe our inner workings and talking about low and high pressure systems and clouds in the sky. That's really lovely. Thank you. So thank you very much for having this conversation with us. It was a delight and I've paid a lot of notes and learned a lot of new things. And yeah, thank you for having been here. And yeah.

Deborah Ross

Thank you for inviting me. It's been an absolutely fabulous hour for me. I mean, what for me, what a great way to start my day. The people that I will be encountering after you, they don't realize how grateful they should be. Thank you.

It's really been my pleasure. And always, you know, if you have questions or, you know, this goes out to folk and they have questions, you know, just to put something in the subject line that, you know, pings me about where they might have something. And then, yeah, just reach out.

Claudia Scheidemann

Thank you so much.

Deborah Ross

You're welcome. Great to be with you.