

Season 3 – Episode 11

Zu Gast: Sandra Marinella

Transkript

Claudia Scheidemann

So welcome to another episode of Tinte und Courage. You already recognize. I'm speaking English. That means we have an English-speaking guest. And I'm very honored to welcome Sandra Marinella to our podcast.

Sandra, you are an award-winning author. You're also a writing teacher and speaker, and your work focuses on expressive writing and the healing power of sharing personal narratives. You wrote a book, *The Story You Need to Tell*, which is a book that Michaela and I both refer to often in our work. So, it's really something for us to speak to you today. And yeah, today you work with people really around the world, guiding them to use their stories to build enough strength, find meaning and support emotional well-being. And yeah, we came together by chance. It was during a breakout room, during INKspiration. So the event Kathleen Adams organized last year, and we immediately clicked and had a very nice conversation. So welcome, Sandra.

Sandra Marinella

Thank you so much. It is truly an honor to work with you, Claudia, and to be here to speak with you. And what a delight to meet Michaela in this wonderful world of words that you have created on this podcast. Thank you for doing the important work that you do.

Claudia Scheidemann

Thank you so much. Thank you. And yeah, we start with all our guests with the question, what is personal writing to you in the moment?

Sandra Marinella

Oh my. I could spend all day answering. [We have time.] It is a beautiful question. Thank you. I think the first word that comes to my mind when I think of what is personal writing to me now is it is truly the framework of my life. I mean, I started keeping a journal when I was seven or eight or nine somewhere in there, I have them. I have many of those journals.

And of course, they don't talk about much, but what I ate for breakfast. But through the years, that dialogue with the self has changed dramatically. And I truly use it to guide my life, to create, not just to create, but to know and to experience, to tell my stories. Yeah, I probably, every few days, I'm writing down my intentions and my plans. And as I grew up, I began to realize that I would take my frustrations to my journal, that I would pour out my problems and my struggles, that I would try to make sense of my life and then try to solve those problems.

And then eventually I spent my life in classrooms, teaching high school, and then college students writing. And I began to see the power of these stories that students were telling. And I began to write in my journal about to power these stories. And I began to share my stories in my

journals. And I came across, and an early mentor of mine in my classroom was Christina Baldwin. And Christina Baldwin has some great books out there, and my favorite one is “Story catcher”. It talks about how important stories are in our lives.

And that profoundly impacted me and it profoundly impacted the work in my classrooms through the years. So that when in 2012 I got cancer, I immediately turned to this personal writing. I went out and bought a red journal, and I wrote through my way, through my cancer. And in the process of that, my cancer hospital asked me if I wanted to teach what I was doing to their patients and I began to do that. And I realized that this personal writing was going to frame my life, that I was going to leave my job at the college, teaching creative writing at that point.

And I was going to just commit my life to this power of this personal writing in my journals and teach other people how to do it. So, when you say, how does this impact you? It is, what is it now? It is my life. It is a story of my life. But thank you for that wonderful question.

Claudia Scheidemann

What I find so interesting in your journey is this switch, so to say, or this development from the creative writing towards the expressive writing. When did you discover this specific area?

Sandra Marinella

I always was passionate about the writing and the power of a narrative. And even as a high school teacher, I was constantly coaching my students when they were writing their narratives and taking them to the counselors at my high school. I mean, they used to joke about how I had a path worn from my classroom to the counselor's office, and it's true. I did.

I mean, I loved connecting kids with who they were in their stories. But it was not until 2012, when I got a cancer diagnosis that I realized something was out of balance in my life. And I turned to my red journal. And truly it was at a balance. The college I was at was, for me, it was a very political situation. I mean, I just wanted to teach and teach passionately, and they had all these other things in mind for me. And so, I had cancer and the writing was just so profoundly healing. And I remember I spent a year, I call it 2012 my year of cancer. And I had four surgeries.

And I, on the final one, a double mastectomy. What I did was, I remember lying there one day, journaling. And suddenly it was like the light was coming through the window. You know, everything just aligns. And you think, oh, this is the most important kind of writing you can do and probably the most important kind of writing you can teach other people to do.

So, I began to read and research everything I could. I mean, I'd always loved research. I was a geek. I still love research. And people, you know, I'm in all these book clubs, but they hate me because I was going to read non-fiction. I want to read, there's a book out that Richard Davidson just put out about flourish, “Born to flourish”. So, you know, I'm suggesting that book and everybody else is going, please. I really love this knowledge that we can learn, the neuroscience of how we work.

And so this immediately, I was invited immediately by Piper Cancer Center to teach, and I did that for a couple of years. And then I volunteered at the clinic downtown, the veterans clinic with the PTSD patients. And that was one of the most moving, surprising, important experiences in my life. Because it was really there that this whole thing crystallized, and I knew I had to write a

book. I couldn't just teach this. And I had experiences there with the veterans that were transformative in their lives and in my life in terms of what I could see as a teacher really mattered. You know, not, I mean, I think writing character is important, but I think writing your life is more important and creating a better life is clearly the goal. Yeah. Did I answer that? I can go on forever.

Michaela Muschitz

But isn't it that's as you explain it, most times it's necessary to write down your own life to understand your own life. What happened - to give things that happened a meaning?

Sandra Marinella

Oh, yes, yes, Michaela. Yes. I think there are certain things that the people who are listening to this podcast, and certainly that Claudia and you and I feel are what life is all about, that we want to know ourselves, and we want to bring meaning to our lives. And we want to have meaningful connections with other people like I'm feeling right now with both of you. I mean, we care about the same things, that's why we're here.

And yes, in writing, that happens in this personal writing. You are able, and Jamie Pennebaker is just such an amazing guru for all of us because his curiosity allowed him to pull back and look down at what he was seeing going on in counseling. You know, people were coming there because they had these horrible secrets and stories. They couldn't tell anybody else. And he thought, well: Why do they have to spend years and thousands of dollars figuring out what that's all about? Can't you just go to a piece of paper and write it now?

And I think probably everyone in this Zoom room right now, and I hope on this podcast, when they were a child began to realize that with a diary or a journal, whatever you had, you began to see that you're seeing yourself on the page. and that you want to become part of that creation process. It's such a gift to have this life. Why just let it happen? Why not help it unfold in a beautiful way? Good question, Michaela.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, and what I find so interesting, so in January, I joined your writer's circle, and I really, really enjoy the teaching there and the writing impulses. And since January, something happened to my brain. We talked before about how writing can influence the brain and that we can change, how this thing up there works.

And I remember one of the first sessions in January that was about this life interview and it was about peak moments in life. And it was about, okay, I could write down two or three things, and I was really disappointed in myself because that couldn't be. I mean, I'm 56, there had to be more. And I was really like, what's going on here? And during the following weeks, from time to time, my brain would just pop up another, oh, you forgot that. And you forgot that.

And it was like I was giving my brain a new search query. So instead of looking for, okay, what were the bad things? And what do I have to manage to explain, to overcome in a way by writing? It was more like, oh, but all the other things happened too. And it's really interesting that this was triggered by just one writing prompt. And that told my brain, okay, I want more of that. And I started to write things down and the list is really long now. And my brain still says, didn't you, you

forgot this and you forgot this. And I mean, I think I've talked about that in the podcast already, but it was such a profound change, really, in how I perceive my own life. And it was just one time writing, actually, that started the process. And a certain level of frustration on top of it.

Sandra Marinella

I am thrilled to hear that, because I think really, of course, my first book was *The Story You Need to Tell*, just that we need to tell story. And the research was all around how we need to find the stories in ... Dan McAdam's work from Northwestern University was so inspirational. Christina Baldwin as well, and I hope you'll have her on the podcast because she would be a person to talk to. But these people were so instrumental in helping me realize that I was teaching story for a reason that we are stories. We really are stories. And that is, and I began studying the neuroscience, Michael Gazzaniga, Antonio Damasio. So many neuroscience, again, you can tell why people don't like me in a book club. I want to read these books. But these books taught me so much about how our minds operate in story. We are stories.

And then, of course, the neuroscience shows us that we have neuroplasticity. I saw you had my friend Deborah Ross and she's all about neuroplasticity. We can change. So I kept thinking, I'm teaching story and people need to write story because then they can pull above it and see what it is and they can't rewrite story. They can choose how they want to create their life. And there is so much power in that. There is, you're authoring your own life.

I mean, it's not that your life will be easy. I've had cancer. That was not an easy journey. My friend, my best friend, when I was 40 committed suicide, that was not an easy journey. I had a baby and I had postpartum [depression] after it. I was confused and frustrated, but I had a journal. And I could write my story and pull above my story and recreate my story and do what I, you know, move forward with it. So, yes, Claudia. And I want to thank you for bringing that prompt up because I pulled that directly from Dan McAdams life story, which I used in writing the book. And when teaching, I created an activity in *The story you need to tell*, which is called chapters. Actually, it was an activity that I had used with my students forever when we were writing narratives.

And I'd added to it and developed it through the years and seeing just profound stories come out of these kids. And I thought if they can come out of kids, think of what it can do for the rest of. So yes, that's one of the prompts that's part of writing your story. And it has taught me this that I want to bring to your podcast today. My research and my work now is on the power of integrating those peak experiences and positive writing in your life. Because if your neuroplasticity, I can write that into your life. I think what you're bringing to it. You're lifting your life up. You're going to have hard experiences. People are going to die. You are going to get ill. It's who we are. But we can also learn from that and grow from that and find those little moments of joy in our lives. So that's, I've got a tear in my eye because you took that prompt and you did that and that's what I'm going for. So thank you for that gift.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah. And what I find so interesting again is this connection between storytelling and the hard facts of science. I mean, I'm also a pharmacist. So when I started to get interested in writing or personal writing, I was really glad that I could find a lot of studies that told me, okay, this really

works. And I'm wondering why this is not, did not spread father. I mean, we try our best to make more people aware of it. And what I find really important is to point out, yes, it's not just, oh, you're telling nice stories and it's with frills and then you have a nice life. No, it's really about there are hard facts, there are studies. And one of the most interesting ones I found was that writing can help with arthritis and asthma so that people could reduce medication in asthma and arthritis because of writing. That was the only intervention. I'm like, okay, that's something.

Sandra Marinella

Oh, that's beautiful. And I want to interject Jamie Pennebaker here. But first, I want to say apothecary of words. When you first wrote to me and you said, I'm a former pharmacist, or maybe are you still a pharmacist?

Claudia Scheidemann

No, no, no, I've left that.

Sandra Marinella

I'm a former pharmacist and now I have a podcast, and it's an apothecary of words. And I thought, what an amazing? She's really a writer. What am I moving for? But from that, yes, I think it's hard to be a writer and not realize, or a teacher as I was for many years, and realize the power of stories. I don't know if you saw the movie Hamnet that just came out. But oh my, I used to teach Hamlet. And I knew about the death of his son, Hamnet. And to see how that story was woven and the power of story and grief when a child dies. We can see that story is not just fluff. That was a deep moving story about grief and death and the power of it.

Now, I said I wanted to take my hat to Jamie Pennebaker here and I do because you said, well, what's one of your favorite books? One of my favorite books is "Opening Up and Writing It Down" by Pennebaker and Joshua Smith. And the reason his work became so pivotal for me is I love all the work in this field. I think Kay Adams is doing amazing work, especially with, you know, trauma writing in those stages to be careful with releasing story or self on the page.

I think Christine Baldwin's doing amazing work with community and with helping people see the value of story across community. Amazing. But Jamie Pennebaker gave to me a very different take and I've taken it in a different direction and it's more of a personal take. It is very much that I want to know myself and I want to help my students and others know themselves and flourish to their fullest degree. And while Jamie Pennebaker is best known for his paradigm, how we can write our way through hardships. And I think it's something you should, every writer should have in their toolbox, his paradigm of writing, you know, write down your problem, explore it on a different level, look at it from a different view, and find what you've learned from it.

Well, something very important came out of that paradigm and the research that I think is too understated. It is that. He was profound in saying the people who were successful using the paradigm were those who completed the story. Were those who told the story and were able to dig into it and find how to learn and grow from it. And that's what I've committed myself to. That's why you have a book called The Story You Need to Tell. I thought that was underplayed that we need to understand that we are story and we are in the process every day of our lives creating a

new one and that we should commit ourselves to doing that in the best possible ways. So I again tip my head to Jamie Pennebaker for that profound realization. Thank you for asking.

Claudia Scheidemann

When we, before we started to record, you also mentioned your work with the Mayo Clinic. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Sandra Marinella

Oh, I could, yes, I would love to. I was telling you that I started work at the Veterans Administration, which was very transformative for me. And out of that, the Director of Integrative Health at Mayo Clinic here in Phoenix, Dr. Denise Milstein, a wonderful, amazing woman, contacted me and asked me if I would be willing to teach The Story You Need To Tell in Integrative Health. And of course, that's our dream in this business, isn't it?

In this field, I should say, is we want to get into the hospitals. We want to show how important writing is as a healing modality. It can help heal us and all the research is showing that. So how are we going to make doctors and patients believe that? So I did go and I did work there. I taught a class called The Story We Need to tell our writing stories to heal and transform. And I did that for five years, and Dr. Milstein and Barb Tomley at Mayo Clinic were wonderful. They collected data on everything that I did. And unfortunately, I didn't bring that pile of data with me today, but I should mention it because it was extremely positive on the changes in people.

Their moods went way up, their stress went way down. Their sense of well-being was much higher. Their pain was way down. And I was a little confused about that because I thought, well, this isn't physical. I'm not teaching anything physical. But I was shocked to find out that it didn't matter. It was affecting them psychologically and by improving their psychology and their spirit, there was apparently in their minds a lot less pain when they were writing and writing to heal. So yeah, wonderful experience.

And I hope in this field that everyone will find connections to hospitals and health care. And I think narrative writing, I was just interviewed by Mayo Clinic last week for their Read Think Row podcast. And they had a book "Prescription for Burnout [restorative writing] for Healthcare Workers by Carolyn Roy Bernstein. I think it comes out today. I think this is a publication day. Yay, Carolyn, where you are. Anyway, it was so powerful because we realized we were walking down the same path. You know, trying to heal people and physicians who are struggling in our culture. I assume they are in yours as well, but it's a rough hoe over here to be a physician with all the insurance and all the rules and how many patients you must see every hour. And so we are finding that writing is a wonderful tool to help them with their just as well. Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

And I think it's important to point out because very often we focus on write to heal for people who have an illness or have traumatic experiences. But it's also if you work in the healthcare sector, and I think that's in Europe more or less the same. The same. In terms of, OK, you have to see that many patients per hour and money is more and more an issue. And the privatization of the healthcare sector is another problem that or another circumstance that creates a lot of

problems that writing can help the health, the people working in the healthcare system as well, to better take care for themselves, but also for their patients.

Michaela Muschitz

Yes. And I think not only in healthcare, I do think that all of the people working in emergency, businesses like police, like firefighters, all those people who really, they do have, they have been trained for it, but sometimes they get in situations that - they are very hard. And those experience you need to handle. And you need to find ways to work with them and to stay with yourself, but also be professional and also be human. And I do think this is a very, very big gap between handle professional the situation and also being human to what happens here. And I know it from a lot of people I've worked with. Because I'm paramedic and a rescue dog handler. And I've been in situations where I know I do have writing to handle these situations, but I see it with my colleagues that they really need something to handle these situations. And I do think that there is still a lot of work to do in those professions where we can support those people with writing.

Sandra Marinella

Absolutely. I think that's the first responders are everywhere now. I mean, we have gun incidents in the United States. We just had one a couple nights ago at the White House or the Hilton, by the White House. Right. So I mean, yes, it's shocking what we're, I mean, we can't solve the cultural issues that we'd like to solve. But we can say that we have to prepare people for those kinds of incidents then. And you're right. You're absolutely right that that work can help that. And it's just absolutely across the board.

As you were talking, I was thinking two weeks ago, I was in Tucson working with stage for cancer patients from Tucson Cancer Conquerers, an amazing group who I honor and love working with. And they wanted to write their legacy. And they were busy writing their stories. And I had such a beautiful time with them. I mean, so in touch with them. They were in touch with their love because they were writing. They know what they're going through, they know who they are. And one of them was writing about exactly what you were talking about. She said, I go to the doctor and I'm a statistic and I'm a piece of paper and I'm a chemo treatment. You know, I'd come to the page and I'm a person and I'm a story. And then another important thing we should talk about is witnessing. Then she was able to read that story and talk about what happened to her with 14 other cancer patients. And she was able to be embraced and honored and received for that and feel like an important human being that matter, that mattered that had a voice, that had agency, that was someone who was living their life she was choosing to live. So very important.

Michaela Muschitz

Some weeks ago, we did a podcast and the man we have been talking to he had a stroke and he said, I am not my illness. I am also a person. And I do think that so often it happens that we are reduced. People are reduced to their problems, to their illness. But this is just a small part. Sometimes it's a big part, but some most of the time, or sometimes it's a small part, but there is still so much more of this person. And also to see and to feel and to recognize these other parts of the person, I do think that's so important. Not reducing people to the illness.

Sandra Marinella

Yes, absolutely. And I think I'll tap into Claudia again because she said peak experiences. I am also my peak experiences, but they almost... And this is why I'm writing passionately about positive writing now is because we are not just our illnesses. We are not defined by, I mean, it goes back to, I go back a long time studying, when I was teaching, I was studying Michael White, one of the narrative therapists. And he was always teaching, and I would work to teach my students this, you are not your problems. You are a person. Your problem is out here and your job is to manage it. And that's what the page lets us do.

And that's why turning to the journal writing. And I did it. Again, I have to thank my friend Christina Baldwin because I didn't know her when I was a new teacher, but she had written a book called "One to One", which was all about journal writing. And it was, I think, the first book of its kind. And so, you know, as a new teacher, I was like, all over it. I was like, this is so cool. My students. ... I thought, when you're a new teacher, you think, I don't know what to say for an hour or two, you know, 30 students. But I could always count on coming up with a good prompt and have them write in their journal for five minutes. And then we could discuss what they had explored and what we were learning and tie it all together. You know, I'd have a theme with what I was teaching. But the power of that was transformative for my teaching. Let alone for my life. So, you know, that's, as you pointed out, that's what we need.

Claudia Scheidemann

And I think it's important to point out something else. And we mentioned it in passing, so to say, that we need good prompts. And this is something I find really important that it's not about I just write down something, just write for five minutes, but that we know about the power of prompts. So that we know, OK, what are the methods? What do I want to achieve? Or what do I want my participants to achieve through a certain thing of writing or a certain way of writing by the prompt that I provide.

Sandra Marinella

I love that because you know me. You know that I'm addicted to writing prompts. I wrote two for you for today. But I think that it's so important to be guided. There's so many writing programs online, and I'm not criticizing them, but I am saying that I think it's really important to be informed to be trauma-informed, to be, I think positive, I'm feeling, and that's why I'm writing my current book, Positive Writing Informed. Understand our psychology. Understand who we are as human beings and what we need so we can nurture that and pull that out and grow us because you can certainly through free writing prompts, trans, you know, find yourself in beautiful territory.

But you can also find yourself traumatized and troubled and suicidal. And I've seen that from some programs. And I think that that's a great concern that we need to be educated to teach writing that is healthy and healing and growth-oriented. And I'm a huge proponent of that. My second master's degree was called Writing to Heal, and there was no such degree in 1994 when I did it. It was just a combination of the English – finding people in the English department in the Anthropology Department who would allow me to study Writing to Heal around the world in the

novels and take a look at you know, the patterns in how it could heal in help us, and we need so much more of that. Good question. Thank you.

Claudia Scheidemann

In your book, that was also something I was particularly surprised by in a positive way that you said that there's also a time not to write.

Sandra Marinella

Yes, yes, yes, because ... and that's why I say you need to be trauma-informed when you teach writing. Yeah, having taught writing for many years, I realized in my classrooms, there was a death in my classroom one time. There was a student who, on a Sunday, went to a Walmart where he worked. And the security guy took him to chase after someone who stole just put a television in his car and drove away. So they jumped in their car and they went after him while the thief didn't know what to do about them. So he parked his car, they parked their car and he went over with his gun and he killed him both. So he killed my student.

And my student was this beautiful, well-loved, dynamic kid – who was gone. And so you come back into my classroom and there's this empty seat and these students who are traumatized. And they came in that day and I said, we're not going to write. I knew the research and the research says that a brain takes a while to absorb a trauma. They were shocked when I said, we're not writing. We're not writing today. We're going to be quiet. We're going to be calm. We're going to breathe deeply. And they brought flowers and keychains and things they put on the desk. And we honored him, and we wrote about him later. But the research very clearly says that one of the big mistakes is charging writing with a drill and saying, spill it out here. The brain needs some space and time. Silence is a beautiful thing. Silence is a holy thing where one can calm themselves, find themselves, and there's something that will hold us together.

And then you can find your way to the page. You know when. Jamie Pennebaker, because I asked him about it, I said, I learned this long ago in classrooms. And I said, what do you think? And he said, oh, yeah, flipout rule. I learned it in the experiments that you just have to be cautious because writing about pain is going to hurt. It's going to hurt. And then to write about it too soon is just retraumatizing.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah. I think it's really important to, as you said, be trauma-informed and also to honor the inner impulse of, no, I can't bring that to the page yet. Also, if you're working on something or managing a problem, that sometimes it's also okay to not write. And it's still writing practice if you pause for two weeks and restart again or write about something completely different and not about the problem. And I think it's so important to find that balance. And that's what I also like about this writing circle you teach, that it's there's time for both things and all things in the middle for the good and the hard parts, but also, okay, something more or less neutral. Yes, that's the art of teaching to write, I think somehow.

Sandra Marinella

I think you're right. I think it's, I think I mean, life is filled with all of those moments, and we can't ignore the hard moments. When I first started researching positive writing, there was all this stuff

about how the positive can be so toxic, positive toxicity. And I thought, wait a minute. Most of the research says we're so negative. It seems like we have such a loud inner critic in us. And the more I researched, I realized that, yeah, we do. Barbara Frederickson says over and over that we're much more likely to be negative than we are positive. So trying to learn positivity is a very valuable skill to try to integrate that into us. But our inner critic is in there screaming and yelling. And one of the things I will say related to what you said, Claudia, is we can, that inner critic can really give us a writer's block. And if you choose to write about something else, or even it's okay, I tell my writers, you know this, to go for a walk or to meditate or to knit. I think you said you knit. Okay. So it's okay. You know those things. You even said when I knit, then I find my words. [Right.] So I do not see writers block. When people ask me about writers block, I go, what is that? I don't feel, I see it in my class if you do what you said, if you guide the prompts so that you're meeting the needs, the psychological, to be honest, sometimes spiritual, sometimes social needs of your writers. So, really well said. I appreciate what you said. Thank you.

Claudia Scheidemann

And you said you prepared some writing prompts. Because I'm curious.

Michaela Muschitz

Yes, funny thing. I also wanted just to ask about those writing prompts for like, Oh my God, what's that? What did you prepare for us?

Sandra Marinella

Well, I think I wrote them on your list. I don't know if I can remember them in my head. You sent me a list to fill out. I'll see what I can do. But yes, and I do have a newsletter that seems to be popular because I put out, I create writing prompts for it. So I will share that with you at the end. But the two that I came up with for you I thought you wanted a general one that I find that is good that I can use with writers because the goal in personal writing for me is to know yourself, to figure yourself out. And certainly not to define yourself we've pointed out by your illness or your problems. And people get stuck in that rumination thing. They start writing in a journal and they're their problem over and over and over again, and I'm constantly going in and in and I know, you're not your problem. You know, you are beyond your problem. And so there's a wonderful poem by William Stafford, and it's your thread. So the thread is something that guides your life, that's with you, that you hold dearly. It never goes away. Other people may not understand it, but it grounds you in who you are. But look up William Stafford's poem.

And I usually, when I was working with my cancer patients in Tucson a couple weeks ago, I read that poem. And of course, you know, poetry therapy. I read it twice, so I could soak in. And then I said, choose a phrase or just start writing about this. But your goal is to find your thread. What is your thread? What grounds you? And oh, Go ahead. I see you're both writing and I'm thinking, yay. There must be something through this one.

Anyway, I think it's a beautiful prompt. I think I might have heard it years ago when I was in a workshop with Christina Baldwin. And I've never forgotten it and I love it dearly. And I think it's something that brings us to the heart of who we are. And my writers always say, well, who are you? And I said, well, clearly I love our writing, you know, but I am, and I think Claudia knows that I am equally passionate about teaching. I mean, I totally find flow, totally find flow with teaching.

And we all have that. Maybe knitting is your flow, maybe rescuing is your flow. You know, Michaela, that was a beautiful story you told about taking care of rescue. And what you bring, caring for others serving is such a beautiful way to, that's why I lose myself in teaching. If we can give ourselves over to something that isn't about us, wow, back to your meaning question. I'm getting all the we're getting all this webbing going on here, all these shared ideas. Yes, beautiful. But I think I think that the thread is important. - Now, I did create one for this podcast and I'm hoping you're going to start writing again as I say this one. I love your title. I love the name of your podcast. For me, it's Ink and Courage, right? And I had to look up and encourage you that. What is tant? Is that writing? Oh, of course it is. So, you know, ink and writing. And this actually was inspired by a blog I just wrote.

I took a trip to Nashville with my college friends. We get together every two years. And we went on this journey of investigating a time I've never been to Nashville, which in the United States is the center of country music. And I've never been a huge country music fan, but I thought, I'm open-minded, I'm going to explore this. And I ended up loving all of these adventures, all of the honkey Tonks, all of the music. But the two things I love the most, I loved the art museum in discovering an artist who was named Barbara Bullock. She was a black artist and she's no longer with us, but she had a stroke at age, 35. And she couldn't see well. And she was a painter, so she went to her painting with a varas (?). I mean, she just was passionate about her painting.

She went to it with all the courage she had. And she painted every truth she could think of about racism, classism in the United States, the poor, the hungry women, how they're ignored. She painted these stories over and over again, and she became an inspiration for all of the artists in Nashville, and not just the women. I mean, everybody revered her. So that when she died, she's this, you know, a huge icon of what art should be. A woman who could hardly see. Painting our story, painting our stories. All right?

And then on the last day, my plane was late to leave Nashville. So my one friend, Sarah, said, "We're gonna go to the Johnny Cash Museum." And I thought, "Oh, Johnny Cash." And then I went, and it was, of course, you have to open your mind. Writing does that. I was writing about this. You have to open your mind. His work was amazing. And I had forgotten how he had this history of singing for the downtrodden and supporting the prisoners and supporting the Native Americans and putting out songs when radio stations didn't want them out there declaring how Native Americans had been abused. So I was just blown away by that courage.

So, and I'm thinking of your podcast the whole time because I'm coming back to do your podcast. So I wrote one of my prompts was, "There are small acts of courage all around. Write the story of one small act of courage". And it could be your own story. You know, I had a friend with me on that trip and she had had six months ago a stroke. So think about it. You know, at first I was writing her story and then I was writing Barbara's and then Johnny's and I thought this could go on for the rest of my life. And it certainly belongs on tint and courage because it just made me feel better, the prompting. So I hope it does you as well.

Michaela Muschitz

Thanks a lot. It doesn't often come to the point when I'm speechless. You just made me speechless because I feel it's so touching and such a beautiful journaling prompt and I'm sure it will make me right in the next days about those small acts of courage. Thanks a lot.

Sandra Marinella

I'm honored and I just want to say that don't forget to look in your own life with self-compassion. Look what you're doing with the rescue dogs and your friends and all the rescues that you're as a paramedic or part of. And I think of Claudia in probably the many of your lives you saved as a pharmacist. I mean, really, I mean, that's an unsung job, but wow, wow. And now you're bringing words to people. So, you know, don't forget that. We forget to be compassionate. I'm told this all the time. People who know me, wait a minute, can you take care of yourself? So we forget that, so honor that.

Claudia Scheidemann

Thank you. And for all of those who listen and wonder, okay, where do I get the writing prompts? We will put all what you mentioned on the blog post for your episode once it's aired. And you can find the writing prompts and all the books you mentioned so far and people in the blog post of the episode.

Sandra Marinella

Oh, wow. That's good. That's good. That'll be one.

Claudia Scheidemann

There will be a transcript too. So you will have all this in writing once you.

Sandra Marinella

Oh, that scares me.

Claudia Scheidemann

No need. - Yeah, you already mentioned a couple of books. Is there one book where you would say, if this is possible, I know we always get this eye roll by our guests, one book, I can't just name one book. But is there probably one book on your mind right now? That way you would say, yes, this is a recommendation for our listeners.

Sandra Marinella

Oh, well, definitely if you haven't read opening up by James Pennebaker, "Opening up and writing it down" by James Pennebaker and Joshua Smith. That is, I think, my pivotal guiding book for Understanding Writing with Trauma and Writing and Story. And then, if you want to know more about story, Christina Baldwin's "Storycatcher", she became, after I read that book, I wrote to her and she became my dear friend. I mean, we're dear friends now and we work together. And I truly love that she sees story on a global community scale more than I do. I see it on a psychological, but we love sharing that and we love the growth that we get from each other. In

learning about this whole amazing process of story in our heads and what we give to it on the page as well. Yes. Thank you. This is been such fun.

Claudia Scheidemann

I just realized one thing and it was there all the time, but at this what you said, or what your specialty really is in a way, how important it is to share our stories. So for my work, I would say the focus right now is, okay, bring your story to the page to learn more about yourself. But what I find as an experience in your writing circle, also by sharing stories. And I mean, we have breakout rooms with people I've just met. And there are also people from Europe, from US, from other parts of the world. And I find it so interesting to be able to connect via our stories.

Sandra Marinella

It drives me to do what I do to see. I don't read the papers every day. I do follow the news. I do follow it in little chunks. But We know this world seems polarized and difficult. And I go to this classroom, I go to my writers, and they are focused on what's important. They are, you know, they are at a different space. They are closing out the negativity that surrounds us, and they are choosing to see their lives in terms of peace, growth, hope, joy, love. And it just inspires me to keep doing every day what I do. I feel it's a beautiful, beautiful experience and beautiful life. It is not, it does not have to be what the headlines portray on our reality. So that's perhaps a crazy view, but I think as writers, you know that it's a healthy view.

Michaela Muschitz

Yeah, definitely.

Sandra Marinella

I hope, I hope. or I live with my illusion.

Claudia Scheidemann

It's not an illusion because I mean, you make it happen in these groups so that I talk to people from, I don't know where, I remember somebody from New York and it's or of other countries in Europe. And we will never meet in that way in person, most probably, but to feel that I can connect with all of them in a way, because we have something human in common. I mean, it's also idealism speaking here, but it's an additional experience besides just writing for myself with my journal. And it's a bigger story in a way.

Sandra Marinella

And I'm grateful you brought it up because I do think we should highlight that being witnessed and sharing your story is critical. And I know when you and I were talking at INKspiration with Jamie Pennebaker, there was some question about, and I think his concern was, it does have to be monitored. I mean, I try to, I know my people and I give you rules. I give you rules in how you approach a group. I shouldn't say rules because I hate that word, but guidelines, ways of behaving that make us better. And I think that helps us hear stories. You know, one of the rules is listen. Listen. Don't try to rewrite, don't try to judge, try to accept and listen to the story, and support the writer who was brave enough to give you the gift of their story. And I always insist the story belongs to the writer. I mean, there are some stories. I wanted immediately to write a story

about what I experienced with my friend and her stroke when we were in Nashville. And I talked with her about that and she said, no, no, leave me out of the blog. And I did. She said, I'm just not ready. you know, that's not what I'm ready to give yet. But we listened to her and we honored her. And you know, it's what we try to do. I won't give you any of her information for that reason, you know, nothing personal. But in general, that happens to all of us, right? We have these hard stories and we hold them to the heart, maybe to the point where they make us still. And we have to learn to, you know, put them on the page, rip the page up, burn the page, do what you have to do to get it out. But eventually you do have to get that out to be healthy.

Claudia Scheidemann

Kind of training ground how to be with each other, these groups.

Sandra Marinella

I'd love to train people in that, so let me know. It is such a beautiful process.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah.

Sandra Marinella

Such a beautiful transformative process to be in communion with people on story, I think.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah. I'd be at the.

Sandra Marinella

Communion on story, yes. Oh, the circle, we call it this circle. Even when we're little ZOOM boxes, and isn't it amazing how this works, how ZOOM has worked for us, who would have known? I mean, the pandemic was not so great, but one of the good things was these little boxes everywhere where we can talk.

Sandra Marinella

You don't even live in the same city, right.

Claudia Scheidemann

We don't even live in the same country.

Sandra Marinella

Oh, you don't.

Claudia Scheidemann

No, I live in Germany and Micaela in Austria. 800 kilometers apart.

Sandra Marinella

I got to report in Germany. Oh, that's one. Wow, that speaks even, I'm impressed, I'm very impressed.

Claudia Scheidemann

Wow. It's an interesting connection between high-tech Zoom and handwriting pen on paper.

Sandra Marinella

Yes, absolutely, absolutely.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, that's how it works.

Sandra Marinella

Yes, beautiful. Tint and courage. Tint and courage. It is exactly that. How'd you come up with the name.

Claudia Scheidemann

It just was there. I don't know. It was a very instant, as I remember, a very instant idea.

Michaela Muschitz

I can remember that we said, that we thought about we need something that it's clear that we want people to know about writing. So and we both love to write with ink. So that was the first part, which was very easy, for example. And the second was, was we wanted people to encourage and to empower them and to give them the strengths to be courageous. And we both love the word because it comes from the French word coerr, which means heart. And so that was the combination we just thought, and it was really quick. The decision was really, really quick. I do think it took us some minutes.

Claudia Scheidemann

Some minutes, yeah. It felt right in a way.

Sandra Marinella

That is a lovely story in itself. True. Yeah. Beautiful.

Claudia Scheidemann

Sandra, thank you so very, very much for your time for being part of the podcast and for on the insights and inspiration you gave us today.

Sandra Marinella

Oh, I feel inspired by your questions and the work that you do. So from my heart to yours, thank you.

Michaela Muschitz

Thanks a lot.