

“My heart is full of journal pages”

Staffel 4 – Episode 02 – Christina Baldwin

Transkript

Claudia Scheidemann

Welcome to the second episode of the season four of our podcast Ink and Courage or Tinte and Courage. Today, we have Christina Baldwin as our guest, and we are really, really, really excited to have her.

She's a pioneer in the field of personal writing and a decades-long teacher of journal and story. Christina, you wrote several books on the topic. Some of them are also available in German. So one is Life's Companion, which is in German's Creative Tagebuch, one to one. One book I especially like is The Seven Whispers, or Die 7 Federleichten Weisheiten in German.

And then there's the book Story Catcher also on journaling and writing. Then you taught something that's called The Circle Practice, and we will talk later on about what this actually is and what this means. And you also wrote two books about this, the circle, calling the circle and the circle way, and the second one is also available in German, a circle, Die Kraft des Kreises.

So we have a lot of books to talk about. And yeah, you live north of Seattle, so we are spanning half the globe with the conversation today. And this is one of the times I'm really, really happy about modern technology that makes this conversation possible. Your latest book is a novel, The Beekeeper Secret. So welcome to the podcast, Christina.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah, danke.

Claudia Scheidemann

So we have quite a lot of to talk about and we jump right in with our first question. The question that all of our guests get in the beginning. What does personal writing mean to you right now?

Christina Baldwin

Personal writing right now means to me that it's like a tether to the ground. It helps me make a path into the day and a path into my life, that I don't think I would be able to hold on to if I didn't wake up and write in my journal several times a week.

Because the conversation, I call it the words beneath the words, that conversation is what guides me. and helps me hold to a sense of making my own way through all the chaos that's around us at this time.

Claudia Scheidemann

And this means you mentioned you write several times a week in your journal. Can you tell us a little bit about your practice probably.

Christina Baldwin

Yes. First, I just want to say that I think I started off writing in 1960, so a while ago. After reading the diary of Anne Frank, which was required reading in the 8th grade school system across the country at that time. And I just was so inspired that a girl could have a voice that I started writing. And it was nothing fancy and nothing literary. It was just those little things a 14-year-old would say to herself.

But as I look back over all these years, I think it is probably the most important decision I ever made in my life. Because it has provided that sense of storyline, that is my story, and also the understanding that **we create the narrative of our life as we go**. So what I do now, all these years later, three or four times a week is when I get up in the morning, I make a cup of tea, I sit down and I write to myself first.

And it might be a little scrap of a dream, I remember. It might be something that I just see out the window that I use as a little entry point into my own thoughts. But there **are several levels of conversation that are important to me**. One is to just keep finding a place to put the things I am most concerned about, both on a personal level and on a wider society level, just to get them down so that I'm not carrying them tightly in my body. And the second is to really look at **intention and gratitude**. So you know **as an older woman, it's kind of bold to still want something from the world**. You know, most of us are supposed to be "Großmuttis" and just sitting around and taking care of very intimate things.

And I love that part of my life, the kind of the gardening and the going to tea, et cetera. But **I still want things**. I want to deposit what I have come to understand, excuse me, about story. And I want to keep engaging and learning with other people. So I set intention for doing that into my journal.

And then it's a way that I practice gratitude is to write down what I notice. And, you know, it's almost like I'm telling Spirit, whatever **this great mystery is that's overarching human experience**. I say, thank you very much. I notice, I am noticing how help comes. I am noticing how I get to meet people across the world. I am noticing these conversations. And **I really believe that that is one of the primary roles of the human being is gratitude and acknowledgement**.

Claudia Scheidemann

I think it's a really nice perspective on gratitude, this noticing part. Because there are different several, and we've already talked also in other episodes about gratitude practices, and I really like this idea of I notice, I see, I witness.

Christina Baldwin

What we notice, we get more of. So I don't want to just take for granted the things that are around me, whether it's the beauty of a flower in my garden or the fact that the green beans are coming on and whatever that kind of thing is or it's too hot or it's too cold. I just like, I'm noticing.

And I have, I don't do this right now, but for many years I kept a tiny, tiny little diary notebook by my bed. And I called it a blessing a day. And before I would go to sleep, I would just pause a minute and pull something from the day that was most of the time little, but I noticed. And I

would just write a paragraph about it. And then at the end of the paragraph, I would write the word "Thank you".

Because when you say thank you, it puts you in relationship to something. So it's not just a little paragraph of pretty words to myself. It is and to whatever that is, you know, to the whatever that is in life that kind of guides us and helps us along, I say thank you over and over again.

Michaela Muschitz

You just said one sentence that really caught me and you said being a woman at a certain age and there are still things you want. And I was like, yes. Who said that at a certain age, you are no longer allowed to want things. [Yeah, yeah.] When did that happen? And I do think that there are not only you touched me, but I can't imagine some of our listeners also. And I really do think, how can we use also journaling to see that there are still things we want and to find them out and to name them.

Because sometimes it's just like I do feel that there's something missing or that I'm curious about something, but sometimes we just can't name them. And maybe writing can become a way of naming those things. And also to allow ourselves that we still want things.

Christina Baldwin

Yes. And when in the Seven Whispers, one of the whispers is: *Ask for what you need and offer what you can*. So that we go back and forth between what we put out and what we receive. And I think as long as we are in this loop, what in English is called reciprocity, you know, where you, I say in the book, people always say, may I give you a hug? Or I need a hug. **Can I have a hug?**

And I go, no, that is impossible. We can only stand together in an embrace. And this. So to me, that is an ultimate image of reciprocity that what goes out, I must also, you know, **I'm asking and giving at the same time**. So that is part of how I stand in the world as a woman. How I've always stood in the world and how I'm still standing in the world is **what can I give and how can I receive and how can that you know, be this kind of circular flow so that whatever I learn, I pass on.** And then.

Claudia Scheidemann

It was also a sentence that caught my attention and it's kind of a permission slip to want things. Beautiful picture. And yeah, the embrace is really a beautiful picture of receiving and giving at the same time. You also have been the book to live, and I don't know how it's termed in the English word, the German version following your purpose. Is that the right? Is it purpose or?

Christina Baldwin

Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

German, it's bestimmung. Sorry, I don't know.

Christina Baldwin

Purposes, yeah, purpose is a good word for that.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah. Or meaning, probably. How would you put that into a relation and also how to find out about the purpose?

Christina Baldwin

Ooh. Oh, the practice, I mean. I think that's the underlying, for me anyway, it is one of the underlying motivations to keep writing in the journal is that when I broke out of the kind of silence that girls were entrained in when I was young, and unfortunately, girls are still often entrained to a level of silence that we may not even know we're maintaining. Because we're just being appropriate in whatever cultural environment we find ourselves.

But for me, the **journal writing has been like chipping away at that wall of silence** ever since I was 14 years old. And it has taught me one that it was there Which is the first thing I think that particularly women and girls need to discover. But I also think there is a kind of silence that men and boys are encouraged to keep. It's just different. And they're encouraged to keep silent about vulnerability and emotion, etc. And **we're encouraged to keep silent about power and want.**

Yeah. So those are big things to crack open and the exploration of that has been fascinating to me. And so it's when I was teaching a lot, I would say things like, I would say you have to trick your mind sometimes to tell you these things. So it would be like **starting a journal entry with "The thing I can never say is..."**, and then of course you say it, right, or **"What I am forbidden to know..."**, or just any kind of lead in like that. So all of a sudden you find that you have opened a door into a new space for writing and for talking to yourself.

And I think the more we understand the sort of the story we are making about who we are and what the world is like as we step forward in our lives over and over again, then we become stronger and stronger because you can't knock me over if I know my story.

Claudia Scheidemann

It's true. And I think I just found also with your inspiration, also a nice sentence, what I'm forbidden to want. And I think there's also something like you said, the silence around power and want for women. It's still there.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

To be ambitious is not something we freely talk about.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

Still.

Christina Baldwin

Right. And, you know, you have someone who rises up like **Angela Merkel**, and it's okay for her, but not for all the German women, you know. It's like, oh, don't, **no, no, no, one at a time.** Maybe one, you know, but not, and that you see how women who take that kind of power are often punished, you know.

Claudia Scheidemann

Exactly.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

And it's scrutiny and the looks are discussed and all these tools, society in the broadest sense has to judge. And it helps to really, at least as a starting point, to tell yourself and listen to yourself, what is it that I want- really.

Christina Baldwin

So that in the journal then, **sometimes I have taken the page and just divided it in half. And on one side, I write, here is what I want. Here is what I don't want. And to just make a list of those things.** And then to really think about it, because sometimes you might start with, I want world peace and I don't want war. You know, it could be huge and global, or it could be very, very tiny.

Like, I just want to make it through the day, and just I want equilibrium. I want enough courage in my heart to make it through the day. So it's very helpful to ask myself early in the morning, what do you want today? And I have to write it down because otherwise, you know, breakfast happens and I have to walk the dog and I open up the emails and shoot what I want is like, what did I say?

So I have little, I have a list of the day laid out, like for today. I have several meetings and then there are several things that I need to do for that other part of my life. And then I'll make that little list and I'll go, okay, what's missing? You know, and what's missing may be more tender time with my partner, it may be, it's summer and today is a day with good enough weather I could go for a bicycle ride, you know, that kind of thing. So I make the list that kind of points me and then I look for what needs to be around that. And then as one of the whispers says, you have to surrender to surprise, Yeah, so.

Claudia Scheidemann

It's interesting that you just said there's space for everything in the journal. I can want world peace, but it can also be about tender time. And I think that's really important to dare in a way to be created enough to write both ends off the line down and everything in the middle too. So that **nothing is too big and nothing's too small to be written down in the journal, I think.**

Christina Baldwin

Absolutely. And you know, as someone who has this long perspective now on journal writing, I mean, I think for many people, they go to the journal, **we go to the journal at the beginning**

because we're going to explode if we don't. And so we go when we're in crisis, when we're in pain, when we're in chaos.

Over the years, many women have said, I started writing during a divorce or a grief or a breakup or something, you know. And so there's a lot of pain at the beginning. There's a lot of anger at the beginning. When people say, how do I look back at my journals now, I say, well, there's about 10 years of whining, of complaining that's all embedded in there. And then you kind of get through that. and begin to tell yourself a different story.

So that, to me, the last 30 or 35 years of my journal are much more, I think, interesting than the first. But not to say I have not sat down and read, I mean, I have no idea, maybe 160 volumes of the journal. I have no, they're in boxes everywhere. But pardon.

Claudia Scheidemann

Have you kept them?

Christina Baldwin

I did. I did, because I think, I mean, first of all, it'll be imprinted on Anne Frank's diary, you know, it's like the miracle of survival of these things. And it isn't just her diary. And as I was studying women's studies in the 70s and 80s, I mean, some of the great things we've learned about female experience historically have been from women who had the capacity, many times in secret, to be literate, to write. And so there were collections of women's diaries over the centuries, etc. that really informed my perspective on the importance of an individual storyline.

Claudia Scheidemann

We just briefly touched when you spoke about your practice with the blessing of the day, you wrote also about journeying as spiritual practice. So I wouldn't name myself as a very spiritual person. So what is your take on that? How would you describe your, what's the connection for you between spirituality and journaling.

Christina Baldwin

I think, you know, there are people who meditate, people who do other kinds of involved spiritual practices, and I'm not very good at them. And when I sit down to meditate, it's so boring listening to the blah blah in my head. So What has happened over time is that I take that and I run it out the end of my pen, you know? And that is very calming to me so that oftentimes I begin almost as a form of mantra or meditation, sometimes even what I would call prayer. And I don't belong to any specific church or religion. But the journal invokes in me a sense of connection to mystery.

So I just opened, I have my journal here on the desk with me, and just a few days ago I began, good morning, myself, my life, my home, my view of the mountains, this tiny point of peace and beauty where my body greets the day, thank you.

And then I begin to write about gratitude for today, right? And I'm not always in that mood, right? But the journal helps me find that place in myself. And whether or not we call it spirituality or religion or if we have no name for it, I find that it's incredibly helpful, maybe even essential to get through what we're living through on a large scale right now is to have an anchor point to something that is bigger than the human ego. And there are some very big egos out there and

bigger Yeah. And bigger than politics and bigger, you know, even when right now where I live, there are huge, huge fires all around us. And I know this is happening in Europe this summer, too. And as we watch the earth in pain at this level, I have to stay anchored to something, you know? Otherwise, I'm just like a scared rabbit running around. So that's when I say spiritual practice it's like, how do I keep my heart open.

Claudia Scheidemann

And this connects it also to one day and day-to-day life. And the experience we are all making right now with this background noise or foreground noise of politics and climate catastrophes and fires. And do you have a suggestion for us how writing can help to develop this anchor point? Because sometimes for me it is like these things are so huge and I feel overwhelmed because I can't change it right now. I can't put out the fires and I can't stop the war. So the things are still happening and what I can do seems infinitesimal small.

Christina Baldwin

So I have a question that I ask often both in talking with people and in writing. And it is, where's the point of empowerment? Okay. And for me, right when I look into the big scope of things, I think I can't. I maybe cannot influence politics other than voting. And today is voting day in America.

Claudia Scheidemann

But midterms.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah, no, not the midterms. It's kind of the setting up all the candidates who will be the final ones. [Okay.] But so I ask, you know, there's my point of empowerment right there is don't be lazy, get you know, make sure you vote. And I talk to the other people around me. Now, most of the people in my age group are everyone I know is a voter, but some of the 30-year-olds are not. And I say, nope, we're going to do this. And here's why, you know, so there's, I can vote, I can talk to the youngers, I can, you know, in terms of the climate, I can just help the plants that are right around me at the edge of the garden and the house.

And you know, so it's like people do those things and they don't acknowledge that that was personal power, right? So then at the end of the day, you go, I did nothing. And I went, no, you did 10 different things that helped to save the world. They were just tiny.

Michaela Muschitz

Yeah.

Christina Baldwin

Or you think they were tiny, but they could be huge. You know. So the more we write those kinds of things down and as a practice of acknowledging, I think it opens up a sense of spirituality inside us. So I see someone who's in distress, and if I'm going to step in and say, how are you? What's the matter? What they see is me leaning toward them asking that question. What's going on in me is a prayer that says, guide me to know what to say. Guide me to know how to help. And

then at end of the day, when I sit down, I go, wow, the most amazing thing that happened to me today was that moment. And now? And when I take time to pause or to write and say, I had this conversation and it brought us both to tears, something shifted. Thank you. You know, thank you that I could be there. And so the writing is a feedback loop. And this is not so much that I need to run out and tell everybody else in the neighborhood. I was so amazing today I had this conversation, you know, because that takes it away.

But you tell your own heart.

You tell your own heart, I'm paying attention. Does that make sense?

Michaela Muschitz

Totally. And it's also, for me, that sounds familiar and we talked about it in this podcast several times that it's also about listening, listening to others and listening to yourself. And with this, what's going on in my life, what's going on around me is something about listening, be aware of things, and also, and I do think, yeah, again, writing it down helps me to sort those things and to see those things and to think think about how can I react? What can I do, as you just said? And thanks for that.

Christina Baldwin

Well, thank you because that's exactly right. It's like becoming your own teacher. And learning as we go through many of these little things. And when I was a little girl, my family, went to church a lot. And there's a phrase in the Bible and the New Testament where Mary, the mother of Jesus, I mean, who is like 13 or 14, right? She's not an old woman. And all these things are happening and wise men are coming and stars are shining and all of this stuff. And at the end of all of that story, it says, "And Mary pondered these things in her heart."

And that is one of the most meaningful phrases in the Bible to me because it says to us, these things happen in our life and our role, our path to understanding them is to take them into our heart and to the inside of my heart is full of journal pages. And that's where I contemplate these these things, so.

Michaela Muschitz

Another question that came up to me is, you do talk a little bit German, because you have been traveling around Europe. And I wrote, I read your, your, Kreatives Tagebuch, that's the German version of the book. How did you come to use writing? And there you have the journey described, and I find it a very, very beautiful metaphor. Do you want to tell us a little bit about this journey, which is some days ago?

Christina Baldwin

Well, yes, but I keep coming back to Germany. So, you know, and I had to come, I keep coming back and I hope to come next spring. So when I was 23, I had graduated from college, and I was working already in the United States. And a professor, a young professor and his wife and two little girls were going to take a year sabbatical in Germany and he was working on a book.

And she said, I don't want to live there for a year with no friends and just the two little girls. So they invited me to come. And she said, you know, we can call you an au pair, but really you are a

friend of the family. And so I went to Germany and we ended up. The professor got a job at a community college for American GI kids, right? So he was able to teach in English and we lived in this little town called Brünigheim. And there I was. And I could speak to the household.

But every time I walked out onto the street, I had to do something in German. So I like an immigrant, you know, I just struggled along with a English-German dictionary, and the little girls were in school, and so they were becoming much better at German than the grown-ups. And so I speak this kind of, you know, butcher German, you know. And I, you know, I was young enough so that the back teeth were coming in, you know, the very back teeth. And I went to the dentist and I didn't know the difference **between Sahne and Zähne**. And so I asked to have my wisdom cream removed instead of my wisdom teeth. And he was this, he said, "Standen or Sitzen?"

And I went, "Sitzen!" He was used to having the farmers come in and point to the tooth and he would just yank it out, yeah. So it was a delightful, amazing year and a half. There we did a lot of traveling around Bavaria and into Austria and just loved that part of Europe. And because I was so isolated and I was young and aspiring and trying to put my life together. I mean, I just wrote and wrote and wrote in the journal. And it really was the foundation of my practice as an adult was that year in Germany. And it served me so well.

I think there was a way that it helped me really develop a sense that of individuality and that I was beyond, you know, now I'm educated, I'm out of college, what do I do, kind of feeling, and really set my course. And I was recently invited to write a piece on "The Life Not Lived", which is very interesting. So that thing that came to me is there was a moment at the end of that time when I could have chosen to stay in Europe or come back to the United States. And both lives were right there. And I was offered a job that I was very interested in doing, and I came back to the United States.

But I have often felt like there was just a part of me that stayed in Europe, you know, and learned to speak German and French, and you know, have a continental life. And one time I was in Germany, not too long ago, maybe just 10 years ago, and we had had a very beautiful, deep, multi-national meeting in Bregenz. And I was walking along Lake Constance, and it was a soft autumn night. And this woman came toward me, and I thought, oh my God, that's me. That's I should it was dressed and it was like we just passed each other and I thought there I am. There is the woman who stayed.

And yeah, it was just an incredible experience to just feel totally connected to the life that I didn't choose. So Europe has always been very significant connection to me. Yeah. Even though I have wished many, many times that I could speak, really speak another language, like the two of you, thank you so much. And thank you so many people, you know, who have been able to step forward and understand English because otherwise I would not have been able to do the things in Europe that I have been able to do. So.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, and you said you are coming back and we, I hope we can keep our audience informed come back and for what you will come back and there's a possibility to attend workshops and stuff like that.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah, there's going to be some kind of three or four day circle training in the Schwanheim monastery.

Claudia Scheidemann

That sounds nice.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah, so I will let you, I will let you know, and also it will be, you know, when the podcast is posted people who get on my website, it will be posted there too. Perfect.

Claudia Scheidemann

Perfect.

Christina Baldwin

Perfect.

Claudia Scheidemann

So what is the circle method? As we are mentioning

Christina Baldwin

So when I was teaching journal writing in the early 90s, I became aware that most of the people who were studying with me were bringing these. It wasn't like they were starting journal writing. They were coming in the middle of their journal writing lives just like I was. I was in my early 40s. And I thought, this is an amazing generation of women. And **we are like Porsches revving and neutral at an intersection.** You know. I am so glad to see you laughing. But, you know, so you come to this intersection, it's like, boom, boom, boom, boom.

And I kept saying, you know, **recovering from our childhoods is not the purpose of adult life.** I mean, it's one thing, but now what are we going to do? And at that time I met my partner, Anne Laneya, and she had been working with environmental activists who are out there really looking at the early signals about the kind of trauma that we're in now. And she said, you know, many of these activists are just burned out because they don't stop and reflect. They just do, do, do.

Nice, well, I have a bunch of women who've been reflecting, reflecting and I want them to start doing. So we began teaching these weekend seminars called *Women and the Planet*. And we brought those two groups together to inform on another. And we met at retreat centers out in the edge of the forest and we always sat in a circle. And what began happening there in the way of insight and story and people's hearts opening, and it was just amazing. And we did this two or three times and looked at each other and said, it's not us. It's not just these 12 women. It's like every 12 women in it. So what is going on here?

And this is before the internet. So we said, it's the circle. The circle is an energetic form that has always been with us for hundreds of thousands of years ever since we lit the first campfire and started cooking.

And then we went researching into very early Europe, like Celtic Europe and Nordic Europe and Tunic Europe before when Europeans were tribal. And looking at, it came up with this idea that the circle is really what made us social human beings because we could gather around a fire. And once we did that, we had to develop ways to be together.

And so we took that, and then we began looking at so many tribal cultures that in spite of colonization, were hanging on to the essence of the circle. And as respectfully as we could, because we're working with European Americans and then Europeans, we said, this is, we don't want to borrow from those cultures, we want to reattach to our own indigenous nature and remember the circle. And that it's actually very simple to energize that space in that you create something, some little visual symbol that you put in the space between that allows people because we are entrained all those years to sit somewhere or stand somewhere and attach to the center.

And then when we energetically attach to the center and speak to the center, we can go amazing places, including into disagreement as long as the disagreement is fed to the fire, not to other people. And so we began training facilitators to remember and understand how to do this. In education and medicine and corporations, especially in Germany, this has been understood at a very profound level. I think because the German character is not afraid of structure.

Claudia Scheidemann

That's a nice way of saying it.

Christina Baldwin

Yes, but also the relief of the lightest possible structure, right? So the basic circle is, you know, that the stories shared in a circle are confidential, but the information needed goes out, right? That we practice listening to one another with curiosity and compassion and not judgment. And that's an amazing practice to do in the journal with ourselves and then to do in collection with other people, to ask for what we need and offer what we can.

And to agree to practice the pause, to invite silence into the circle as well as speaking. And so in our tradition, we have some kind of little bowl or bell that makes it a chime. And whenever that chime rings, everybody stops and takes a breath. And it can be an acknowledgement at the end of a story where you can feel that we all need a few seconds to just take it in. It can be a way of interrupting something where people are now arguing across the circle at one another instead a reminder to speak to the center. So it's, and what happens there? I use it in everything I do.

Because when I started off teaching journal writing, I thought, I can't stand up here at a lectern and tell people what to put on the page, we have to sit down and explore together. So it's always been part of story work and journal writing. Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

It's really an amazing idea in its core and also it's both, for me, it's the simplicity and also it covers complexity as well. And that's what I find so amazing.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah. Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

You mentioned that you use it also in the context of medicine. As a pharmacist, I'm curious. Do you have an example?

Christina Baldwin

Yes, we did a lot of training with nurses, especially in hospital settings. And there can be a buildup of all those little tensions and resentments and that kind of thing. So the circle comes in and says at the shift change when you come in, you gather in a circle and you put the patients in the middle.

You know, you just put the patients in the middle and then you say, how am I showing up today? And someone says, I feel really strong and good. I had a good night's sleep. Someone else says, my baby kept me awake all night. You know, other things. And they say, this may impact how I am today. Just please give me a little compassion. And someone else says, that's okay, you can count on me.

And **so that it builds the team before they start the work**. And then at the end of the day, things have happened. There had been surrender to surprise over and over and over again. And so before they go home, once again, they check in and they check out. And they talk about how the day went, and they thank each other. You know, there was that moment when I was running between this room and that room and you said, I'll get this. And it creates, then in a real crisis, you don't have to go, oh, my dear sweet one, would you please get the cart? You know, it's like, we need the cart.

And so when you shift from a relationship language then into that kind of emergency language, everybody's there and nobody is taking offense. Yeah. So it has had a profound impact on the subtlety of nursing care that the patient may not know about. Yeah. And you can do the same thing at the beginning of any workday is to check in and check out, you know.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, that's true. And also that it's not an emergency tool if things already gone wrong, but it's practice on a daily basis at best. So I think that that's something, and that's also one part I think is also one of the insights to go slower. And I find it extremely hard to really do this.

And to allow also in journaling, of course, sometimes want the solution right away. So I want the right exercise, the right writing prompt, and then in one sitting everything is clear. [Let me know how that goes.] It's kind of, I learned over time that this is probably not what Right, right, somewhere.

And to also see their some things take time and practices like these, they allow to slow down in a way that is manageable, is doable, because it has a certain framing to it. And I'm wondering how to also do that in my daily life and just check in, check out and not take the phone in my hand and start the endless loop of scrolling. Yeah. That's for me the always the back and forth, some days at work, some days it doesn't, but I always get back to the page.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah, yeah, me too. But it's the impact of the scrolling world on our ability to sit down with ourselves for 10 minutes is really horrifying to me. You know, is it right? It is. This need to constantly be stimulated by a lot of nothingness, you know, it's like, it looks good while you're looking at it, and then it's like whip cream, you know, you carry it out and it's like sticky, but you can't remember.

Yeah. So I just, I have rules for myself, and I have a little timer on the phone that in the evening, it plays a little bit of a lullaby, and it turns things off. And I have a rule that no scrolling, no looking after that, you know, it's like just to be with yourself for the last hour of being awake, you know, go read a book, write in the journal, do some, you know, sit outside in the dusk when things are starting to cool down, you know, just whatever.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, my screen also turns black and white after, I think, 7:30 right now.

Yeah. That helps actually. It's not that colorful bright thing anymore. It's boring black and white. That also helps.

Christina Baldwin

And you know, one of the things that I have found over the years to be really helpful. And I don't, I say to myself, I'm not doing this enough right now, but is to be to do dialogue work in the journal. And so to do a dialogue, like you could do a dialogue with your phone. And now it's like, and what you say, I'm going to turn you off now and the phone goes, look at this. I'm sorry. Happening for the last 15 minutes, you know, it's like, but you can you can make then this kind of raise your own awareness of how those algorithms pull on us.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah. Right.

Christina Baldwin

You know, and sometimes I will be writing along and I look back in the journal and there's like half a page and I go, I allowed myself to be disrupted. And it wasn't by some real life something, it was by an impulse. And like, oh, I have to look this up right now. And I talk to myself and I say, you know what? The news in the newspaper has already happened, and it will be waiting for you whenever you want to go there. Do you really want to go there now?

And to me, that kind of self-talk is much more helpful than beating myself up, you know? So I try to keep myself talk at that level of curiosity and not judge much. But to ask myself, as I'm reaching for the phone, do you really want to go there now or is there something else you want? Then oftentimes it allows me then to put that down to come back and focus on what has heart and what has meaning.

Claudia Scheidemann

And I think these are things, as you said, these dialogues to rehearse in a way on the page. I mean, they will probably happen again and again and again, because this little thing is really, really attractive sometimes. [Yes.] Or it makes itself appear like that, probably let's say like that. I mean, I remember a time when I didn't have such a thing. So what did I do with my time then? What was it then.

Christina Baldwin

Very good writing prompt.

Claudia Scheidemann

Exactly. And the strange thing is it's hard to remember, because it's all these mundane things you don't really pay attention to. It's habits that happen. They don't stick as a memory in your brain. And that sometimes it's really kind of recreating. What did I have? What did I do? Was it the TV back then? Did I just turn it on just like I pick up my phone? So it's really interesting to remember. And it sounds like, well, the internet was black and white and that happened.

Michaela Muschitz

One question, sorry.

Christina Baldwin

No, well, I just want to say that we have to do that dialogue work with the brain, you know, with our own minds. And because that's what the algorithm is doing. It's like little, you know, it's little tendrils into the brain, into the mind, saying that increases the impulse.

And so I am in a dialogue with my own mind about get back to, you know, **get back to my own source of guidance**, get back to, you know, and of course then the phone goes, I know what to do, I'll sell her a meditation app, you know, I'll sell her a journal writing app, and then she'll be on the phone and thinking she's doing these.

So I just, **I do none of that on the phone. I love the feel of paper. I love writing with fountain pens and the kind of sensual experience. And I make a ritual out of the writing time. Like even here talking to you, I have a little tiny candle lit on the desk and I haven't written in my journal while we talk. But I have my pens laid out. I have the journal is open. There's a chime nearby that I use to just kind of calm myself down. I have a cup of tea. It's like you create this environment of self-nourishment.**

And then if you live in a place where you can just leave some of that there, it's like there's a special place that I leave my journal and my pens. And the candle is there waiting to be lit. It's like, as I go by in the course of the day, I go, oh, and there's my special spot. There's waiting for me is this attachment to guidance. Why would I not go there?

Michaela Muschitz

Right.

Christina Baldwin

And if I ignore it very long, there comes a time where I go to bed and I lie awake for an hour and a half, and I go, oh, just get up and write. Because I'm not going to sleep until I move this chaotic buildup from the inside to the outside. And as soon as I begin writing, it's much less chaotic.

Michaela Muschitz

Right.

Christina Baldwin

You know, yeah, so.

Claudia Scheidemann

That's one of the strange things I sometimes hesitate to go to the page because, oh my goodness, it sounds so huge in my head and it's so dramatic and it's the worst possible thing that can happen or could happen or whatever. And then I dread to go to the page because I don't want to write such terrible things. And when I start writing, usually, they are not that terrible anymore. I don't know what happens between brain and ink on paper somehow, sometimes, not always, but very often it shrinks it.

Christina Baldwin

Well, and narrative is how we link life experience and somehow it's self-organizing in a way. And I think that's part of the experience. The other thing I want to say is there are times we really need to write the worst, and to scream on the page, to be very angry, and it's hard to do that, and people including myself, are often afraid, well, that now will be discovered in some way.

So I encourage people if you know you just have to do a lot of traumatic writing, do it in a separate book where that's your screaming book, you know, or that's your grief book. And then you can decide later what you want to do with it. Some people ceremonially take it to the fire and burn it.

One thing that I have done is that I take the page and I just write and then I turn the paper upside down and I write again. And then you can turn it sideways and write again. And it's the, you're giving yourself neurologically the release, but no one could ever read it because it's just a jumble now of ink marks on the page. I don't know how you would do that if you're typing, so I recommend. Yeah. Scribbling away, but then it moves it to the outside and it moves it through the eye. It moves it through the mind in a way that encourages that self-organizing, but no one can see it later.

Claudia Scheidemann

And it's still also an image of the turbulence of turbulences. And it's not It's not, it didn't smooth out something. So it's still the scramble on the page. It's still chaotic image and that's the representation of what was in my head before. That's, I've never tried that. I will definitely.

Christina Baldwin

Let me know.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, I will. I will. Yeah, there might be something there.

Michaela Muschitz

One question. You wrote also a novel. How did it come?

Christina Baldwin

That's such a mystery, I think. So while I was teaching all those decades at the retreat center on the island, they always allowed me to bring my dog. And I have had over all these years, I have always had a dog who is very sensitive. And so I would have this dog. Her name was Glory B. And she would come into the circle and we would be sitting on low chairs near the floor and people would be talking to the center and crying and writing and, you know, the kinds of beauty and emotion that goes on in these settings.

And she would just observe and she would go and put herself next to someone who needed to stick their fingers into fur. And over time, I thought, you know, there's a saying in English that dog is God spelled backwards because it's the same three letters. And I just thought, this is a spiritual practice she's doing. And then I ask myself, maybe this is how that mystery, we would just call it God for a shorthand word, but maybe that's how God comes in the room is it comes through her and she sits down and she offers herself to this person and then that person.

And when she died, I got so many letters from people who had studied in that space saying, you probably never noticed, but, and I thought, oh yes, I noticed all the time. And so I decided to write a novel based on a dog that accompanies this woman through her life. And then, of course, a dog doesn't live that long, so the dog keeps showing up as different dogs. And then I took it to a workshop and the teacher said, I love this dog. Obviously, he has a college education and has majored in psychology. You know, and all of these things. He said, I don't think the dog can carry the story. you need to let the dog be a dog and let the people come forward.

And I had started writing about the 1940s. and about World War II. And no matter how many different ways I tried to tell the story of this family, it just kept taking them back to not so much the war. I mean, so many war stories, and I'm sure this is true in German literature, too, are about the drama of the battlefield. But what happens to the people in the village? What happens to the people at home? And I wanted to tell that story because I think we're living that story now.

Most of us we're not in the battlefield, but we're in the village being impacted by the battles of our times. And this family doesn't know how it's going to turn out. Young men are being called away and people have to figure out how to live in community. There's a lot of tension. There's a lot of racial tension in the West, especially ... Well, still, but at that time, the native people had very recently been pushed off the land.

And so I just wanted to bring all of that in and see if by going to the 1940s, we could help ourselves live through the 2020s. And it seems to be working very well. People, there's lovely generations in the in the story. It was important to me to, as I wrote about the experiences of one of the American soldier who goes abroad, that the Germans are not the evil. You know, it's all these young men caught up in the terrible things that we demand soldiers do. And he suffers and he comes home. And when he comes home, he discovers that the edge of his town is full of

German POWs, because when Rommel's army was captured in Tunisia, there were 250,000 men that they didn't want to have come back into the war. So they brought them to the United States to do farm labor and factory work, et cetera.

And then there was a whole other thing going on here between Germans and Americans. And it just became very fascinating to me to explore that and to look at the role of native people at that time. So it's doing very well in like the book clubs in America. And I have friends in Germany who have read it and have just kind of dumped it into Google Translate when they needed help here and there and things. Yeah, I mean, that's part of technology now that is incredible.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, right. I have to say I've started, and it's really a story that pulled me in immediately. So I haven't finished it yet, but it's really gripping and interesting. And as a German to see the other perspective, it's intriguing. It's just intriguing.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah, thank you. Yes, I am too. And it's very interesting. And I also wanted to really explore the question about how do you hang onto your moral code in a time like that? And that's a question very important for us right now too. [Right]. And I think a lot of people get that from the story, that it's an exploration of ordinary people who are just having to understand and define their own integrity and their moral code, no matter what the world around them is doing.

Claudia Scheidemann

And I think that's really an important question to ponder oneself, especially in Germany, with the far right getting stronger and several elections ahead, to really look at oneself honestly and think about integrity and what are my values and do they good?

Christina Baldwin

Yeah. And you know, I think Germany has made, there are several things that I have really admired about Germany. One is its willingness to examine the Nazi era. And I know that that's not like, oh yes, everybody, you know, it's very individualized, but there has been a kind of reckoning that America has not done. And it has led us to where we are now.

And there is, we were the good guys. We don't have to examine anything. Over there, they were the bad guys. Oh, now they're good guys. Oh, okay. How did that, you know, I mean, it is amazing in the course of my lifetime to watch that switch. And to be horrified at it. But a lot of it is things that white America, that colonial America, has not looked at. And it's all coming to the surface and it is chaotic. And I just go to the page over and over again to say, and here's my thread.

Claudia Scheidemann

And I think that links also. I mean, you've written one book story catcher. And I think that for me, that links overall history with personal history and personal writing to also examine these things. That it's not just the day-to-day diary in a sense, but really looking in the mirror on the page, so to say.

Christina Baldwin

Oh, beautiful.

Claudia Scheidemann

And do the deep dives.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah, yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

I'm not shying away from them.

Christina Baldwin

Yes. Well, I am so delighted to be with the two of you and your beautiful young faces and to know that you're helping so many people reattach to this kind of practice. And indeed, it is Ink & Courage. I love the whole, the logo of the fire and the feather. I mean, it's just, it's, so yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

Thank you so much.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah, I hope we get to meet if I come in next spring that would be so delight.

Claudia Scheidemann

Oh, that would be really, really delightful.

Christina Baldwin

Let's put that in the journal and say it right.

Claudia Scheidemann

We talked about intentions at the beginning.

Michaela Muschitz

That's a good one. That's a good one. Two last questions, which are not the easiest one, but we will manage. Question number one is, do you have a favorite book? It also can be books. So if you have two or three,

Claudia Scheidemann

Or the current favorite book.

Christina Baldwin

Yes, I hardly know how to answer that. But I think in the context of our talking about Germany and America, one of them is the novel "Stones From the River" by Ursula Hegi. And she is a

German who was born in Germany, and the Stones From the River is the story of a small German town in the 1930s and 40s, and all those moral choices that get made during that time frame.

And I love that book because it took me right into the German experience of the village, you know. And also it was a book so beautifully written, I have given it to many Jewish friends to help increase empathy and understanding of how could this happen. So that is one I would recommend. And I would guess it's in German, you know. Yeah, you find out.

And then I think, you know, there are so many books about writing one's life. And I really have enjoyed Sandra Marinelli's book. You interviewed her not too long ago. *The story you need to tell*, and I've loved how our two ways of teaching have come together over time and continue to influence each other.

But yeah, I mean, I read a lot, and then it was very, it's very hard because the book will go, oh yes, this, and then another one comes. But I'll go look at my bookshelf and...

Michaela Muschitz

We totally understand it.

Claudia Scheidemann

People who write usually, we found out usually our voracious readers as well. So these two things somehow always come together. Thank you for the recommendations.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah.

Michaela Muschitz

And the last question is, do you have a favorite writing prompt you use or like to recommend.

Christina Baldwin

When I don't know what to write, when I'm not sure what I'm going to say, that's often the first thing I write at the top of the page. I always say date the page and forget all the other rules.

But sometimes I just start with, *I don't know what to say*. And if nothing comes, I say, *I still don't know what to say*. And then if I recite that a few times, then pretty soon I start saying it.

I think the most reliable way for me to come in is not so much one sentence but is to gather myself. So I go to that place and I carry my journal everywhere. It's like, oh, maybe I'll have three minutes. I can write in my journal. So I will just close my eyes wherever I am. I just close my eyes and I just take a few breaths and then I open my eyes and it just, I will go, oh, a blue tea cup.

And then as soon as I write a blue tea cup, the connection begins to flow to something else. Like a blue tea cup. I got this cup from a friend. I got this cup from a friend who died. And then I go into writing about missing her or whatever. And it's like going down the children's slide.

It's just to capture something that's in front of my eyes. I may look at a screen and go, we are all wearing glasses. And then all of a sudden I go into the power of sight and the difference between

looking outward and looking inward. I have no idea. But it's amazing where your mind will take you in just five minutes or 10 minutes if you just close, open, and grab anything that's right there.

Michaela Muschitz

Right.

Christina Baldwin

So that's my favorite prompt. It's really to just take that breath and grab out of the scenery of right where I am.

Michaela Muschitz

Thanks a lot.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah, thank you.

Claudia Scheidemann

That's doable, always.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah, 5 minutes. Yeah. Okay.

Michaela Muschitz

So thanks for this inspirational talk. I'm still with DOG and GOD for ideas. I also have two dogs and I really can feel that. And that's a very, very nice picture. I think I will look at my dogs in a different kind of way.

Claudia Scheidemann

God in disguise.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah, yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

Thanks very, very much.

Christina Baldwin

Yeah, you're welcome. And we'll just do some follow-up and I would adore to meet you when I come.

Claudia Scheidemann

That would be fantastic.

Christina Baldwin

Okay.

Claudia Scheidemann

So to all our listeners, we will put together, as always, blog posts with all the books that were mentioned, the writing prompts and ideas. And you can find that on our web page.

And yeah, thank you for the conversations. And we hope for a real time, real life meeting some day.

Christina Baldwin

Thank you. Auf Wiedersehen.

Claudia Scheidemann

Auf Wiedersehen.

Michaela Muschitz

Auf Wiedersehen.