

Shadow Journaling – Writing as Personal Alchemy

Staffel 4 – Episode 4 – Our guest: Oliver Mann

Transkript

Claudia Scheidemann

Welcome to another Episode of Tinte & Courage or Courage and Ink in English. And as you may guess already, we have an English-speaking guest today. Oliver Mann, thank you that you're here. And welcome to our podcast.

Oliver Mann

Thank you very much for inviting me.

Claudia Scheidemann

You are the author of Shadow Journaling - A Field Guide to Personal Alchemy. That's your new book that just came out in July. And you're also the creator, obviously, of the Shadow Journaling Methodology. Oh my goodness. After years searching for more and more self-awareness, you realized that the secret wasn't in learning more, but in accepting and allowing ourselves or yourself to be more complete.

I'm very much looking forward to talk about this part. And you also aco-founder of the Barcelona Journey Festival and you run workshops and also do one-on-one mentoring. So we have a lot of things we can talk about today with you. And we start with the question we ask everybody as the first question, what does personal writing in look as shadow journaling mean to you right now in the moment?

Oliver Mann

The moment? This is an ongoing process for me. It's not like I've done my journaling and now I'm kind of finished. It's a way for me to really connect with who I am all the time and I use the idea of friction in life as my kind of guideline. So my little metaphor for this is that the Buddha doesn't get annoyed about anything. So if I'm getting annoyed about something, then it means I'm the problem. So I use that as a way to kind of see where is it? There's something that's affecting me. And from there, it just becomes an exploration, basically. And then I use that as a way to see what's going on in my life, really. A big part of this is to find ways to let the unconscious come up and be observed. And that gives us an amazing opportunity, I feel, for personal growth, basically.

Claudia Scheidemann

And how do we get to the unconscious? I mean, it's unconscious. What's What's your approach there? And is this the same as the shadow in shadow journaling or are these two different things for you?

Oliver Mann

No, to me that is pretty much the same thing in the sense that to me journaling as in many ways playing hide and seek with the ego and the unconscious.

And so one of the ways is using friction, like you find out where something is affecting you.

I can't remember, there's a quiet in the book by someone else that it talks about this idea of Everything can either inform you or affect you.

And when something affects you, that is usually the unconscious that's spilling out and showing itself as in there's something here that's unresolved inside me. But other ways is just through pure journaling techniques in the sense of, so I use a lot of sentence stems in my workshops.

And a big part of that on a practical level is repetition gives you an opportunity to go past the ego. Because the ego is gatekeeping and trying to keep you safe. So make sure that the table isn't being shook and the house of cards doesn't fall down. But our job, if we want to have growth in this, is really to find ways past it.

So like I said, repetition is one way of doing it. Writing for longer than we feel comfortable with, this is one way. So as much as I'm not a big fan of warning pages, I think it's It's a good starting point of a journaling technique.

But what works very well with mourning pages is that it forces you to write for a certain amount of distance. So if you've done your three pages, a lot of the time people start struggling after a certain point. And that's where the natural blockage is. That's what we can start protecting ourselves. And then being able to push past that really helps us get into a space where we can start revealing more and more of who we are and what's actually going on.

Claudia Scheidemann

That's actually something I see in my workshops as well where people I give them 10 minutes to write and after 5 minutes a lot of people already put down their pen and say well I'm ready I'm done and I try to explain please try to go on and do you have an advice how to do that how to overcome this resistance.

Oliver Mann

I think the first thing is to have the realization that this is what's happening. Because I think once you sit down, you're writing and you get like, oh, I'm done now. I've done my journaling for today or I'm going to go make a cup of coffee or whatever it is to clean the kitchen. At that point, having that realization that this is what's going on gives us an opportunity to say, you know what, I'll give myself another 5 minutes.

Another way is to set yourself those artificial limits and say I'm going to write for minimum of 15 minutes or 20 minutes or however long it feels comfortable. Or uncomfortable actually. So you should kind of go beyond the comfort and go into that discomfort. So that's one way of doing it. Yeah, I think is really, but I think the key is awareness to realize what's happening. And then we can start making decisions based on consciousness rather than distraction.

Claudia Scheidemann

The thing about confidence was actually something I marked in your book, so I have it here with me. And I was wondering because I always tell people, OK, please take care of yourself. There's this flipout rule. Don't write if it's really too uncomfortable. So I'm wondering what kind of uncomfortable or what time of uncomfortable are we after?

Oliver Mann

Well, I think honesty reveals a lot of things that are uncomfortable. And I think it's important to be willing to sit in that.

I think for me, the most uncomfortable writing is when I start admitting things to myself that I don't want to. And realizing that there are parts of me that I don't like, but they're there. And then I have to move beyond it. I have to actually say, OK, this is a part of who I am, even though I don't like it. And that process can be uncomfortable, right?

And taking ownership of these aspects of ourselves also involves Being willing to say, look, I've done a lot of stuff that wasn't helpful to myself or to other people, but that willingness to admit it is so crucial for moving forwards. But at the same time, it's deeply uncomfortable.

Michaela Muschitz

I also marked a sentence in your book, I resonate a lot with. If it feels too easy to get the inside, it's probably not something particularly deep. And I do seeing that sometimes what we see in our workshops that there are people that don't want to go that deep because it's not easy. And so we're avoiding it because we also are afraid of what will come up, what things arising, we don't know how to handle them. Isn't it? That's something that you also observe?

Oliver Mann

I think, so I've got a lot of trust in the human process in this. So just like, I like any shit metaphors, like please do excuse me. But for example, it's like peeling an onion. And you can't peel the inside of the onion first. So I do believe that this kind of work goes through that process of peeling one layer and then you realize, okay, there's more here and then you do another layer.

And that realization is that you kind of go deeper and deeper into the same subject matter. And that process happens quite naturally in the sense that if you get people into a workshop, they're unlikely to go straight into some of the deepest, heaviest things in the first go.

But that process is about going, OK, let's return to this subject again later on, and then we can see it from a different angle, for example, and that helps us. So I've not had anybody in my workshops, even though I do quite deep stuff with people, go and flip out. Because I think there is this sense of, OK, I'm going to treat this with some respect, perhaps, but I think there's also a natural tendency of ourselves to go, like, I can't see the depth yet.

So I have to allow myself to take one layer of a time. And I think going back to what you said about this idea that if it's too easy, then it's not that deep. And I think what's important with that is, the way I see it is the ego is keeping us safe. And the ego knows that you're going to keep journaling and you're going to try to figure out what's going on because this is what you're up to at the moment.

So what it will do is say, lo, Remember that time when your grandmother said this, that means X, Y, Z, and this is why you behave the way that you do now. And you go, okay, fine, that's easy. The difficult part is to go beyond that, right, and go, okay, well, what else does it mean about me? I'm the one who's stuck with that. And like a big part of this work is to realize that a lot of what we're doing is we're building identities. And identities are what causes a lot of our problems because we get attached to a version of ourselves.

And like, I personally, I was very much stuck in this identity of a personal growth person. Like, I want to become more and more self-aware. And that became my identity. But in order of that identity to stay, I can't change. I can't actually grow. So it became like another lock. I kind of created a new prison for myself. So in that process, I want to grow, I want to change. And then I build up that very, very strong identity of I am a searcher, I read these books on personal development, I do my journaling.

But unless I'm willing to go a level deeper, then I'm just created another identity that keeps me safe in a process, but it doesn't actually change my life.

Claudia Scheidemann

I'm just looking at my extended library of self-help books and think, well, maybe there's something about that. And I think you mentioned in your book also this kind of almost addiction to, oh, I can oh another great insight, another great whatever. And at the end of the day, what you are doing in your life, actually, the actions don't really change.

And that's for me, is the crucial point in journaling, where does it leave the page and leaps, so to say, or drips into real life actions. And we can, I think, I'm sure I've done that journal forever about a certain topic and get insights, gain insights. And I don't want to let go of that problem in a way because it's so interesting.

Oliver Mann

It's very fascinating this way that we create these connections. I remember having a moment where I was right at the moment where I could have a beautiful argument, a point where I could really push something forwards that would make my point and it was felt like, you know, I've got this.

And then this insight came to me that like I'm only pushing this as an ego thing. And I realized I could let go of this and I could step out of that whole thing. And instead of going into an argument, I could realize what was actually happening. But at the same time, I also got really annoyed because I was like, shit. I could just have this amazing ego argument here and I'm letting go. This is so shit.

So there was a real change, but I could still hear that voice of the past going like, but you could have this was yours to take. But that kind of that wisdom that came from it was just very frustrating because I kind of I lost out of having an amazing argument that I could have won. So I think this kind of goes back to that identity sense, right? This realization that I am a searcher.

But actually what I really want to do, I want to be a person who changes. I want to live a different life. I want to live a more, yeah, a more content life. And that contentment comes from making decisions that the ego in the moment might not be particularly happy with.

Claudia Scheidemann

That's really, really an interesting insight to, if you come, I mean, we also work in this industry of self-help, self-personal growth stuff, and to see, OK, where are the limitations actually to that, and how much do I allow it to define me as person, and where are the the points where I can or have to let go of certain things. I believe about myself and say, okay, that doesn't serve me well right now. I need some new idea about who I am or who I want to become. Interesting. Wow.

Oliver Mann

I think, but this is where this is what the kind of the key to acceptance lies, I think. So I've been working with a couple of people who've been feeling like they feel like they're stuck. They feel like they're overthinking. They feel like they're intellectualizing their lives.

And these are symptoms of people who are stuck in personal growth. And then there's this idea that they're going, oh, I want to get rid of it. I want to get rid of my overthinking. I want to get rid of this version of me that's an intellectualizer.

And it becomes a battle. And you're never going to win because the fight is inside you. And the trick here and this is where it's complicated is to realize that I love intellectualizing my life. That is something that I enjoy. Even though I'm publicly telling you that I hate it, it makes me feel stuck. I feel like I can't do anything with my life because I'm paralyzed by all these thoughts.

But then when you can go into that, but I really, really love it. This is part of me that because when I'm intellectualizing, it means I feel like I'm doing something even though not. It gives me an opportunity to pretend I've got control. It makes me feel safe. And also sometimes it makes us feel like we're like amazing at parties because we're talking to people and we like, look, I'm so self-aware. I know these things about myself and I'm like so personally developed. It's fantastic. And we feel really proud of ourselves.

Claudia Scheidemann

I'm so smart. They're really smart.

Oliver Mann

Yeah, exactly, right? But then once we can accept that that part is there and there are these secondary benefits of blocking ourselves. Then we can go, okay, fine.

So now I recognize that that intellectualizer is something that I enjoy having and being. We can bring it up into the light and go, okay, I see you, but you no longer have to control my life. You've been running the show for a long time, but right now I want to let the intuitive, the spontaneous, the young version of me have some more space to control things.

And I think the the biggest problem with this kind of work is that we have this thought that once I get rid of it, I'll be fine. And it doesn't happen, right?

So I had like I had an amazing insight this is a couple of months ago where I was I was looking at like money mindset and these kind of things. I was going, yeah, you know, like I'm so, I've read the books, I've probably gone through the affirmations and all this kind of stuff.

I was wondering, what is it that's causing this issue? And there was this realization that there's a part of me that wants to stay poor.

And that woke up something because I could look at it and go okay. So there's a part of me that wants to stay poor because it's something I know very well. It feels safe. It gives me an opportunity to complain about things. It gives me an opportunity to kind of keep my victimhood alive. It gives me something to have this great hope that somebody will come and save me.

Maybe I'll find a lottery ticket on the street and I'll become a millionaire. But in order for that to have power, I need to feel poor. Because if I feel rich, all these things are not valid anymore.

So in that realization and I could accept it, I could see that my money mindset on one end of like, yes, this is great. I want to make money on this kind of things and I'm okay with it. There was this other part of me, yeah, but let's just stay poor because we know it. And the real shift here was this realization that that voice doesn't disappear.

What happens is that you recognize it for what it is and you realize that, okay, that voice of wanting to stay poor is there, but I can see it for what it is and go, this is not the truth, this isn't me in my best. But I can go, OK, I see you, I hear you, but I'm not going to take that into account right now. I'm going to do something else. But thank you for your observation and insights and opinions. Right now, because I'm aware of it, it doesn't drag me down.

And the amazing benefit from this has been that it's not like suddenly there's tens of thousands coming into my bank account, but what has happened is I am much less stressed. And that is a major relief. And this goes back to Michaela, what you were talking about with this sense of if something comes too easy.

And I think there was this moment of relief. And to me, that's the major distinction of what is a realization that comes into acceptance, rather than that kind of part of me that goes, ah, you know, like, superficially realizing, oh yeah, because this person said this when I was young, that's why I'm having money problems because it affected me. And that's like an intellectual insight. But that acceptance that doesn't matter what this person said. I'm the one who's embodying it. I'm the one who's living. And once I can let go of that and let go of that means bring it into light and saying, I see you. You no longer going to be controlling the show, but I see that you're here.

Michaela Muschitz

And I don't want to get rid of you. This part of acceptance. Yeah, but accepting that you can't get rid of it. That's, I do think it's so hard. To accept, yes, you are here. I do see you. But I won't listen to you anymore. And now somebody else is taking control. I do think that's a very, it's the hard part of this work. But also the part that's needed to be done. And of this one.

Oliver Mann

And discomfort.

Michaela Muschitz

Yeah, and it's the discomfort. And in the beginning of the book, you have the sentence from somebody else, life begins at the end of the comfort zone. And I was like, yes, definitely. Even if it's very, very uncomfortable, but we have to realize that. And I really can resonate to your, I know how it feels to be poor.

I know how it feels to really struggle with how can I pay the next rent and all those things definitely know that. But how do I get out of that? But it's the easier way to stay poor because I know I can control it somehow because I know it. But saying goodbye to these things. And looking for some other ways to deal with it makes the discomfort because we don't know what will be on the way, what do I have to do in this new area? And that makes us feel nervous, anxious, all those things. And I do think that this is a very big part that's affecting a lot of people, me too.

Oliver Mann

And but this goes back to this idea we talked about earlier around identity, right? So we build up a very carefully constructed identity of somebody who is struggling with money. And then of course you don't want to get rid of that identity.

I think a lot of people go through this kind of work, have periods of feeling very sad. And that sadness is sometimes just a mourning that a part of us has died, you know? So that identity that we've had to let go of invokes a sense of sadness.

And you realize, OK, this person has been with me, this version has been with me for a long time and now they're not, right? At least not in the same capacity. And that is, it's sad and uncomfortable.

I think this is like, so in the methodology that I use, that's the final step here which is really about kindness. And having that compassion for ourselves and go, do you know what? Like, just because I've been stuck in this identity and mindset for a long time doesn't mean I have to stay stuck there, right?

So now it's my opportunity to move beyond it, but I can only move beyond it once I accept that it's there. And I keep quoting Nathaniel Brandon on this, because he said, **self-acceptance does not mean that you have to like it**. I think this is absolutely critical to realize that self-acceptance is this sense of.

Michaela Muschitz

Oh yes.

Oliver Mann

Because if I accept something, there's this natural feeling that I have to say that this is me and I like who I am and self-love and all this kind of shit. But the reality is that it's possible to say, **I really, really do not like the part of me that's greedy, but it's still there. And now that I see that it's there, now we can make the change, but I cannot make the change if I pretend that it's not there.**

Claudia Scheidemann

I think part of the sadness you just mentioned is also to realize there was a time in my life when that version of me was necessary to build. And that's usually these parts where you can get stuck is usually not versions that developed in situations that were nice, and that this kind of protection was necessary at a certain point. And I think that's also part of this kind of sadness that comes up when we need these parts of us that want to protect us in the end but are no longer necessary or are getting in the way, actually.

Oliver Mann

And I think this is like, a lot of the work that I do can touch on quite heavy topics underneath it. But the trick for me is that more observation and more analysis and more excavation is not going to solve the problem. So like digging into trauma at another level from a different angle and trying to figure out what else could it have meant and all these kind of things. Like, OK, you touch on it, but have the realization that when I look at that situation today, I'll feel one thing. And when I look at it tomorrow, I'm going to feel something else. So there's no truth to come back to.

So by being able to look at it from that perspective, we can say, well, it's not true. It's a version of events. And instead of trying to go well, as long as I, **if I one day find out the truth of who I am, then everything will be solved.**

My attitude is more, what can I do that's helpful? How can I create something that is helpful to me? Because I'm very good at lying to myself, about things that make me feel shit. So I might as well lie to myself about things that feel good because they're equally true, right?

Because **I'm in carrying all these stories and they're making them feel very sad and shit and it kind of like it justifies my victimhood. But they're just as true as a story that goes, you know what, you're amazing. You've gone through a lot of stuff and you're doing well and all these things are, they're equally as true as the other stories. But somehow they're harder to tell ourselves.**

Claudia Scheidemann

For me, this reminds me of this acceptance of the parts that are there and will not go away no matter how hard I try. It's for me similar to also acceptance of all the emotions that are there. To me, it's a similar process that there is a part that is really angry or really afraid and this is kind of an overlap. So I don't know how you approach that, but for me, it's really a kind of a method to also write about these uncomfortable emotions. When do they pop up? And it's a little bit easier by now to write about the emotions and then come to the part who feels like this. And so probably kind of a bridge to the other thing that same here, **anger doesn't go away if you are aware of the things that make you angry. They will still make you angry, probably.**

Oliver Mann

I think for me the key here is just being curious. I don't trust myself basically. I know that I'm very good at lying to myself. So I'm always trying to figure out what's going on beyond it, what's behind the emotion, what's really, what's really going on.

Anger is a good one for me. Like when I'm angry is usually because I'm sad. And then the question is what am I sad about? Like what is it that's going on? And And it's just becomes an exploration into that.

Michaela Muschitz

What I was thinking about when I started reading your book, what was your intention? Because at some point you write, you could have not been able to write this book 20 years ago or even five years ago. What was it that you were able to write it now?

Oliver Mann

I think a big part of it, there's multiple layers here. One reason I wouldn't be able to do it before is I wouldn't believe in myself enough to do it. That's basically it.

That I would be judging myself, thinking, who am I to write this book? Who am I to think that my point is worth sharing and not want to be seen about it basically. And that's a major shift that happened in the last couple of years, especially. I had this desire to stay hidden because I was terrified that if somebody sees me, they'll see the real me and then they'll be rejected.

And then there was this other side of me that just desperately wanted to be seen and recognized and acknowledged. And this is a big part of the process for me. **This realization that you've got contradictions.** And once you take a contradiction, a contradiction is a complicated part because it causes internal tension. But a paradox is when you realize that they're both true at the same time.

And when you can shift into a moment of paradox and realize it's okay for me to want to hide and it's okay for me to want to be seen. And they're both equally true. It gives me an opportunity, again, like I talked about these other things. I can get out of that identity of I'm hiding and go, OK, that was the old me. And the new me is going to go, you know what? I'm going to write this book. I'm going to do something about it because it's important to me and I want to get this message out because I know that it has impact.

So that's probably the most relevant part of it. I tell people that I couldn't have written this book if I hadn't done the work because it's changed the way that I show up. Basically, if you'd asked me, you know, four years ago, do I want to come in a podcast and talk about what I do? Be like, are you crazy? I'm just doing my own shit. Stop bothering me. I don't want anybody to know.

But now, like anybody says, you want to go in a podcast and like, yeah, this is great. I'm super happy to talk about this shit. It's amazing. Right? And I think - a big shift for me was this realization that **being the most self-aware person in the room is really, really pointless. It's so boring after a while** because you're going like, I got so bored of talking about my own shit, about knowing my own shit. That you're going like, what, why am I still here?

Like, if I've known about this for like 40 years, why am I still in this? You know, **how is it possible that all this personal growth has led me to zero growth, just more awareness.**

So the process for me started off with this exploration **of Karl Jung's concept of psychological alchemy.** And he talks about the four stages, the blackening, the whitening, the yellowing, and the reddening.

And the blackening and the whitening are the parts where we, in between those two, where we have a confrontation and we observe and we try to find out what's going on, is realization that something isn't quite right. And then I'm trying to find out what it is. But the next stage is really about where we're going to acceptance. And I didn't do that.

I was just going back and forth. I was getting more and more aware. And then I had this realization from reading. It was like, ah, shit there is a next step. There's more here. Like, like someone gave you the first, you know, you know, this old map, right? You guys, I'm at the end of the page now. I just turn it over, the map continues on the other side, like, aha, OK.

And that was really like the point when I thought, shit there's, I just need to start accepting and then rewriting what it means to be me. And go, OK, well, if I know this now, what can I do with my life if I know that these things are here?

Claudia Scheidemann

You mean, that's really, the point in acceptance, actually, to be able to talk about what's there where I'm probably not really proud of, but you can't shame me for that. You know what I mean.

Oliver Mann

Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

So I've integrated or accepted it in a way that even if somebody says, Yeah, you're the one, you always want to be in the center of interest and say, yeah, and?.

Oliver Mann

Yeah, no, absolutely. I think this is where, for me, a major part of this is that we are so judging of us.

Michaela Muschitz

So what?

Oliver Mann

Yeah. But that self-judgment is of all the things that we haven't accepted. And that means we get so triggered by other people that remind us of the parts that we're hiding. All right.

But once you can accept them and bring them up, then nobody can hurt you anymore. Like you said, right? So if you say like, are you going to be the center of attention all of times? Like, yes or what? And? I do! But another part here, and I think this is so critical in this, is this realization that it doesn't mean *all the time*. I contain bits of everything, but none of those bits is all of me. And I think this is sometimes a complicated aspect of this because that self-acceptance part is like, well, I am this, but not all of the time and not all of me.

So just because I had this realization that I want to be seen and I'm happy to jump on podcasts all the time, that doesn't mean that the only thing I want to do is be on podcasts. It doesn't mean that I constantly trying to find ways for people to see me. There's still parts to me that I want to stay in bed and just like not meet anybody for ages. And I think once we can see that, then acceptance becomes easier as well.

Like it becomes, I contain this rather than I am this. I think there goes back to what you were talking about earlier as well, Claudia, about the emotions, right? To realize that, you know, I contain sadness, but I am not a sad person. You know, I have anxiety, but that doesn't mean that I'm necessarily an anxious person all the time.

I think this is something that also gets me a lot with the current way that people are thinking that there's a lot of it that is a pathologization of the human experience. And the fact is that we are a lot of things and it's OK to be sad without saying I'm depressed. It's OK to say I'm nervous without saying I'm anxious person or I suffer from anxiety. These things are normal human experiences. And obviously some people do suffer properly from depression and properly from anxiety, but most of us are just nervous because things are bloody scary.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, exactly. So the feeling is exactly appropriate.

Oliver Mann

Yes, exactly.

Claudia Scheidemann

In that moment.

Oliver Mann

Yeah, absolutely. If you're not anxious now, then there's something wrong with you.

Claudia Scheidemann

Exactly. And I think that's the, for me, the part of the work is really to understand that I can be opposite things in certain situations. I mean, there are situations where I definitely don't want to be in the center of attention and just want to, okay, just leave me alone and I can relax and do other things, for example, lie in bed and do nothing and rest. So it's appropriate that all of these parts are there, they all make sense, and I can't be 100% one thing and not the other that's just not possible.

Oliver Mann

And I think this is like the trick, right, to personal growth, really. Going from these inner conflicts, you know, like I had that greed was one that was very big for me.

I grew up with the stories of my dad being extremely generous and he would just, if somebody was in his house and they said, oh, this is really beautiful. What's this? And they're like, well, you can have it.

So this story of like being generous was this amazing thing and it's something that I should aspire to. And I am a very generous person. So when I had these realizations of greed, it became a conflict. And I just thought, OK, this doesn't match.

And it would show up in, like I use this stupid example, like if I got a good bottle of wine and I'm sharing it with somebody, I'll desperately try to make sure I get more of the wine than other people because it's so good. So this is it was a major conflict of generosity. If I'm a generous person, why am I trying to sneak myself more of this good wine than this person who I obviously care about enough to share the wine with in the first place?

So it's a complete issue around it. But now that I come to terms with and I realize there is a part of me that's greedy, it's there and it's not always something that I'm happy about, very rarely happy about it. But now, like, the solution is buy more wine. But now I know, right? So now I know that if I've got a good bottle of wine to share, I need to make sure I've got more wine, because then I don't have to worry about that greedy part. And I can laugh at it. You know, I got, OK, fine. This is OK. Like, it's OK.

Claudia Scheidemann

That's the perfect solution, actually, for everybody.

Oliver Mann

Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

Including the wine maker.

Oliver Mann

Yeah, exactly.

Claudia Scheidemann

I find that so interesting that very often, if we look at these parts and at some point, very often that made the experience, there's a point where you can start to laugh about it. And then I think that's it, then you've done it. Then it's not all the time again, but if this is possible, that's for me a sign that okay, I can relax there.

Oliver Mann

And this goes back to what we're talking about right in the beginning, this idea of something can inform you or affect you. Right. Now it informs me. It doesn't affect me. So somebody says I'm greedy. I'm like, yeah, I know. I just really love good wine. I'm sorry. And it becomes a level of information rather than somebody blaming me for this and like, whereas before I'd be probably defensive and try to figure out a way to kind of excuse myself from this and whatever it is. But yeah, like, yeah, that's true. In trivial things like wine, I can be very greedy. But in other things where it's more important than I'm not, so.

Claudia Scheidemann

You've hope for these insights. It's really what I always find so interesting, all the different possibilities, how you can journal.

And I have to admit that this kind of, OK, I take whatever bothers me as a starting point I can really connect to. Because that's always something where I said, okay, what's the point? What am I projecting on somebody else? What do I want that this person is having and or is showing or is behaving like? And so I've started to work a bit with your book, not all of it yet, of course, but I think it will be a really interesting journey. Of all the writing prompts, in the book or you use in your workshops. Is there one that you say, OK, this is a go-to sentence stem or a method or whatever you would like to share.

Oliver Mann

So curiosity is like the key thing for me as a starting point. And then the next thing is about being honest. So it's not so much about a single prompt because I think we're all coming at things from different directions. But **the first thing is to not accept the first thing that comes to mind. So there's somebody uses phrase, which is amazing. They call it rehearsed answers.**

And I'm moving beyond the rehearsed answers and going and finding out what's actually going on behind the scenes. And so in that process, there's a prompt that I use, which is: **What am I not writing now?** Which is extremely helpful.

Like what am I not writing now gives you permission to to let go, right? Like, actually, it's like telling somebody to not think of a pink elephant. And it's impossible. So what am I not writing now becomes like a trigger to go, OK, now this is there's something I'm hiding here.

But then the other thing that I also tell people who are struggling with honesty, for example, is to burn the paper. Which I think is a very powerful thing to do. But what I do say to people, which is also like another idea of burning paper is quite a normal thing.

But I would suggest that people should burn the paper twice. So basically, first you write on paper and then you burn it and then you write again on paper that you will burn. Because what you've done in the first burning is proof to yourself that is actually true. And then you have an opportunity to go. I proved to myself that when I write this on paper, I will burn it. And now what will I let go of if I write a second time and let the next level of stuff come out because I know that this will be burnt.

Claudia Scheidemann

Wow, that sounds amazing. I will try that.

Michaela Muschitz

Another question we ask all our guests, which we know is the nearly impossible question, but we try it again. Is there a favorite book or favorite books which inspired you, changed your way of thinking? Whatever you want to recommend to our listeners.

Oliver Mann

There are two books that come to mind. that I go back to. One of them is a collection of essays written about the shadow. It's called Meeting the Shadow by Connie Zweig.

And it's just an exceptional, exceptional collection of works by amazing, amazing writers. And several of them I quoted in my book because it has been so fantastic. I've got it on Kindle and I got to the point where Kindle won't let me highlight anything more because I've gone beyond what is actually allowed. So I was like, okay, this is a sign.

And the other one is **Six Pillars of Self Esteem** by Nathaniel Brandon. I think if I was going to highlight a book that has had the most impact on me as like a single thing, I think that would be the book. And It also introduced me to a lot of the concepts around self-esteem and self-acceptance, which are very, very important to my work, but also to sentence stems, which is one of the most profound journaling techniques that are out there.

And like at the back of the book, it's got like a 35 week program with four sentence stems that you use every single day. It's just, it's an extremely impactful book, and I would I would love to be able to write a book with that level of depth and power. That's like my aspiration is to come out with a book like that.

Claudia Scheidemann

So thank you for the book recommendations. We will put them on the blog page for this episode, of course. And you will also find when you're listening to us now, all the other information and links to reach Oliver and his web page.

And as a final question, tell us a bit about the Barcelona Journaling Festival. I haven't yet had the opportunity to visit. So what - convince me. Why should I go?

Oliver Mann

The festival is basically a celebration of community around people who do journaling. And it's, as we all know, journaling is very insular and personal and private experience. So when people connect at the festival, it's like, all these people who know exactly what it is that we're all going through. We know our processes are there and learning from each other and sharing. And it becomes like it is a festival rather than the conference.

So the idea is that like it's just amazing fun. Like people are creating friendships, they're becoming connected with people all over the world. And it's a fantastic way to learn new techniques and new ways of approaching it. I think this is where it's so exciting because there's no rules. Nobody can say this is the wrong way of doing it.

So it gives us an opportunity to say, okay, well, how are you doing this? What's your approach? How can I take something from this? And I think that's where, for anybody who's interested in this kind of process of work, it's an absolute, it's two days of intense writing and learning and connecting. And just amazing fun.

To me, it's, I've got to say, like the feeling that comes up all the time at the festival is I feel humbled. Because it's just such an amazing experience to see people coming together around something that is so important and it's important on a personal level and then not feel alone in it. I think that's the thing. Like people feel really, really connected around something that's so, so important.

Claudia Scheidemann

It's such a kind of strange thing actually to connect over such a personal practice in the end, but for me and that's also why Michaela and I are trying to or building up a writing community because it is a different level of writing if you write in community and then talk about your process or your findings or to learn as you said from each other and also Barcelona, I mean, it's a beautiful city.

Oliver Mann

Not a bad place to be.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, when is the next one.

Oliver Mann

It's going to be on the 7th and 8th of November, so in about three months.

Claudia Scheidemann

Okay, so there. [We'll see you there?] Yeah, I don't think so, date collisions, but just do it another year and then.

Oliver Mann

Oh, we will, we will. We already got next year planned, it's fine.

Claudia Scheidemann

Wow, that's nice. That's good to know. And with whom do you do this festival? So the co-founder, what was the, when did it start? I mean.

Oliver Mann

So this is year three. And it started off with my co-founder, Marusha. And yeah, she had this idea of connecting professionals around journaling and stuff like this. And she asked me if I want to be a part of it. And then as we talked about it, it just got bigger and bigger. And we managed to get Kay Adams to come down for the first year, which was absolutely amazing to meet her.

And then it just kind of grew from there. So we were about 60-70 people in the first year. And then last year, we were about 150. So yeah, we're hoping to be around the same, maybe a little bit bigger this year. But at the same time, it's kind of enough. It's not so big that people feel disconnected. So it's a very nice kind of group of people.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, you still have the feeling of, okay, I can manage the crowd in a way. Still find people to connect to and don't miss out too much. I think that's also important to not be overwhelmed of too much.

Oliver Mann

Yeah, and I think the other side here is that this is also an incredibly, incredibly generous crowd in the sense that everybody knows that it's probably a huge number of introverts there. So everybody has this understanding that when people need to back out, they can back out. And we also run this system, we did this from the first year, that we give people an opportunity to give people stickers.

So if you have a sticker on that's a red one, then you're basically having time out because like I'm overwhelmed with what's going on, I'm just going to back out and then you can just people just see that like okay fine I'm going to let you be in your space and then we got green stickers for people who just ready to go and then yellow stickers for people who are maybe looking to connect but maybe a bit too shy.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, that's a great idea.

Oliver Mann

And we also do a buddy system so when people come because we realize there's a lot of people flying in alone we make sure that everybody who's there has one other person that they can check in with.

Because I think it's so important when we doing this kind of companionship. But then we kind of make that happen because I think it's so important because it's like that buddy system means that the people who are traveling alone suddenly are not alone anymore. And just that knowing that there's somebody there with you helps a lot in that process because then suddenly it's easier to open up.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, that sounds really like a great experience overall. So I'm sad that I can't attend this here.

Oliver Mann

We'll see you next year.

Claudia Scheidemann

Next year. And if you're already planning then, there's a big chance.

Oliver Mann

Yes.

Claudia Scheidemann

Okay. So thank you so much for this conversation. It was really, I mean, we jumped right in from the beginning into the deep water. So thank you very much for being here. And yeah.

Oliver Mann

Thank you for inviting. It's been absolutely a pleasure.

Claudia Scheidemann

You're welcome.

Wer Lust hat, den Stapel ungelesener Bücher noch kleiner werden zu lassen. Also, es erreichen unsab und zu dann Nachrichten unserer Hörer:innen, die sagen, ja, das ist ja ganz schön, dass ihr so tolle Bücher vorstellt, aber der Stapel wird zu groß. Und ab September bieten wir einen Buchclub an in der „Tinte & Courage“- Community. Schaut auf der Webseite vorbei, da findet ihr erste Informationen und wir wollen monatlich jeweils ein Buch lesen und darüber schriftlich diskutieren, sozusagen.