

## Let's create an Ecosystem of Goodness

### Staffel 4 – Episode 6

### Zu Gast: Lynda Monk

### Transcript

Claudia Scheidemann

Welcome to another episode of Tinte und Courage or Ink and Courage. Today we have Linda Monk as our guest. Linda is an author, speaker, registered social worker, certified professional coach, and director of the International Association for Journal Writing, IAJW. For more than 30 years, she has helped people harness the power of writing for self-discovery, healing, creativity and personal growth.

She's also a recognized leader in the field of journaling and co-editor of the Great Book of Journaling, which I have right next to me on my desk, and transformational journaling for coaches, therapists, and clients. She's also the author of the new book, The Adoptees Guide to Healing, Bonus, and Growth, which came out, I think, beginning of the year, right?

And through her workshops, courses, and the global journaling community, she inspires people to connect more deeply with themselves, their stories, and their creative potential. And I can say I've attended workshops of the association, and yeah, she really does that. She lives with her family on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, Canada. So again, we are spanning half the globe, nine time zones to bring you the podcast with Lynda Monk. Welcome. We're glad that you're here.

Lynda Monk

Thank you so much. I'm honored to be here. And I love how this technology does let us connect all over the world and meet new writing friends.

Claudia Scheidemann

It is amazing, really. And yeah, we start right off with the first question that all of our guests get. So what does personal writing mean to you in the moment? I mean, you started writing very early. So what is it now?

Lynda Monk

Well, it means the world to me. I was thinking about how, if I look forward in my life and if I get the privilege of growing to be an old woman, I'm 57 now, that I hope the abiding practice of being able to write will be able to stay with me all my life. I've had two parents with Alzheimer's disease, my father who passed and my mother who has advanced Alzheimer's now. And my mom used to also like she used to love to write, she loved sending cards to her friends and And she lost all of that ability.

And I was thinking, if there was one thing I hope I get to have my whole life, it will be the ability to write. It truly is so important to me, my own personal journaling practice. And I also have a love for sharing writing with others through stories and through books.

And I think it's a way to have legacy in our lives. Our books live beyond us. I remember Christina Baldwin, an author who I admire. I was in a writing workshop with her once on, oh my gosh, what island was it that she lives on? I can't remember at the moment. But she said, **what do we want the future to find? And I was thinking our writing is something the future gets to find.** So it really does mean everything to me. I put it, loving my family is the top thing, and I have other big things that are top priorities, but writing truly means that much to me that it sits at the top of the list. I can't imagine life without it and I don't want to.

Claudia Scheidemann

It has also formed and informed and inspired your professional life as well.

Lynda Monk

Yes, exactly. And that was something I dreamed of early in my career as a social worker when I was doing other types of work. I was doing crisis intervention work and child welfare. I did a lot in the area of suicide prevention and intervention. I worked as a medical social worker. And all through that, I was using my own writing for self-care and burnout prevention. And then later, after I did my Master of Social Work, where I asked the question, how do you do this type of work for a whole career and not burnout? Because I was early in my career and I could see that colleagues would go off on stress leave and some would never come back and I thought, well, I don't want that to happen. How do I stay healthy and happy and engaged doing this work?

And **in that research, I learned that having a reflective practice can help prevent burnout. And specifically, the research showed that journaling could help.** So all of a sudden, this thing that was just my own personal, private thing I did since being a young girl on and off, this writing of stories and thoughts and feelings, all of a sudden it got elevated and had a different sort of level of gravity to it in that wow, this could be my secret sauce, just keep writing.

**It's kind of like Nemo, just keep swimming.** That little fish in the kids movie if I just keep writing. I can stay healthy and not burn out. And so as I learned that, and had my own experiences of just exactly that, how writing helped me stay grounded and present and process emotions. I wanted to share that with other people. And so I started creating workshops on journaling for self-care for fellow social workers and helping professionals, health care professionals.

And slowly over time, it just became more and more of my work. And I had a whole chapter of life where my work was around burnout prevention training and I worked with other professionals in that space and I would slip in these little modules in a whole day workshop on going to the page and people would fill out their evaluations at the end and you know what was their favorite part and all of that and often people would say they'd love the journaling part. And we were talking doing lots of things in those workshops and I thought well I love the journaling part too. What if I just make a whole day workshop on that?

And so it just inched along through the years and expanded and expanded. And I now look at my career at this stage, and literally every day is about writing, about taking people to the page

through guided writing circles, through workshops, online courses, helping other people get their courses out there, teaching other people the art of journal coaching, which is the program I co-created with Dr. Eric Maisel, and I just had this vision of the ripple effect that the more and more of us, including yourselves with your beautiful podcast, the more of us that are talking about the power of writing, the joy of it, the benefits of it, like we create this momentum. And I like to think of it as that tipping point where all of a sudden it's not so unusual or just a few select people who do this, but really a vast vast number of us going to the page to know and grow ourselves.

So I really feel excited about that, that kind of think of it as a pebble in the pond that when I write and I guide other people to write and then some of those people take writing to other people and then people have podcasts about writing, we're all part of this big ecosystem of goodness that is supporting going to the page to truly enrich our lives and wellbeing individually and collectively. I'm very passionate about it.

Claudia Scheidemann

We are too. I mean, this is really one of the greatest motivations for us to do the podcast because what we find in the German-speaking countries, yes, there are people who journal. But there is a tendency, let's put it like that, to put it in the corner of well it's just diary writing. And we want to make people aware of No there's science behind there are certain types of writing that you can do and exactly to prevent burnout. And I love that this focus you had previously on caring professionals.

And I think this is a very, very important point I think we've discussed it in other episodes as well. There is so much about what can you do in self-care and awareness and stuff like that. And very often Germany isn't part of these programs. And I also wonder why, and this is something we want to change as well. Do you have a special or what What did, sorry. What did you find out? Is there a specific, in your research, is there a specific kind of journaling of writing, personal writing? Which qualities does writing need to have to prevent burnout and help preventing that?

Lynda Monk

Yeah, we could do a whole episode just on that, but some of the key things are really engaging in expressive writing. Which is writing about thoughts and feelings, not just happenings. Today I did this. It's more than recording but really getting into that place of being honest and uncensored and free with writing about how a person is feeling, what they're thinking, and also being able to keep tapping into resilience, what went well today.

It's very easy to focus on what went hard, what overwhelmed us, what was painful. And yes, we have to process those emotions. It's like getting the inside out and clearing and releasing, rebalancing, recharging. And it's important to focus our writing towards that resilient story. Who am I becoming because of what I'm doing? How am I becoming a more compassionate person, a kinder person? How is my own world enlarging because of what I experience the type of work that I do, who I am as a person.

So it's really focusing on the strength stories. What am I proud of today? How did I help today? How did I make a difference today? Because these are core values that helpers have, they want to make a difference and often feel like they can't in the systems of care they're working in that

might be underfunded or overstretched. So we want to keep seeing what we still are accomplishing, not just what we can't accomplish.

The power of gratitude journaling stay because what we focus on grows and if we can stay grateful for that client, I want to spend time with today, grateful to that colleague that I had you know, a short chat with, all the, you know, grateful for taking a few minutes outside in nature, just keep anchoring into the elements of our days that strengthen us, that help us tap into our joy, our wellbeing, our enoughness. There's always more to do, but I did my best today, and for that, you know, I give thanks. And there's many, many things we can do, but using the journal as a true companion for personal growth and well-being and pointing the writing towards the type of writing activities, prompts and so forth that help us do that. Not just regurgitating, this was a hard day, I'm so tired. Another next day, this was a hard day, I'm so tired. Because we're creating those neuropathways and we can really get entrenched and that can be more of a rumination in our writing versus our release, a catharsis and a resiliency building practice.

So there's lots we can do, and there are very enjoyable things to do in our writing. And there's lots of research to support the benefits of positive writing, positive journaling, as well as that very cathartic writing about those very difficult, stressful, even traumatic events that can be processed and restoried and trained in narrative therapy, internal therapy and there's the great work of many researchers that James Pennebaker had some of the early work, I'm sure you're well aware of, that showed some of the healing and restorative benefits of writing about the difficult things as well.

But again, not just to write about them and stay there, there's that pause where you say, okay, what did I learn from going through this difficult thing? So we're harvesting for that learning, again, for that strength and resilient story.

Michaela Muschitz

I find it very, very interesting that how do you think does it come from that I do know so many people in social workers, paramedics, caring professionals who are very, very good in their job, but when it comes to self-care, they are really so bad in taking care of themselves. How do you get people to understand why it's important also to do journal writing as you just talked about? How do you get people there? Yeah. That they see journaling as self-care.

Lynda Monk

Yeah. Well, first of all, I want to go to the first thing you said about why. Why sometimes that self-care is difficult because caring professions really foster a lot of martyrdom. They really foster selfless energy. That caring should just be something people do infinitely without asking for anything in return. There's a lot of self-sacrifice that helping professions actually breed and cultivate. People work over time and they're not They're asked to do things without enough money. Teachers are asked to do things in classrooms without enough budgets. Social workers are asked to do things without enough funding to run their programs. Most of the organizations, healthcare and healthcare during COVID, for example, and before and after, nurses and doctors are asked to do the impossible to ask to work long hours, barely sleep.

The expectations of these roles, these caregiving roles, is that we just give and give and give even when there's nothing more to give. And that is a recipe for burnout. So burnout isn't just at the individual level. It's at the systemic level with lack of resources and all kinds of things.

Again, that could be its own conversation. So the bridge to cross as a helping professional or a caregiver is a bridge that has to say my own wellbeing is a core value. It is a core priority. And I do not have to self-sacrifice to the level of harming myself and experiencing professional burnout. You don't have to go through professional burnout to earn your worth as a valuable helping professional. And if you're in the context, as I've been in hospitals and social service agencies, a lot of the languages around who's the most tired, who's work the longest, as if these are badges of honor instead of ingredients for extreme harm and damage that comes to individuals who are trying to work in that environment.

So there's a large systemic work to do to normalize and give permission for self-care for helping professionals and not just lip service. Because if you stand in front of a room of social workers, for example, as I've done hundreds of times in my career and you just start talking self-care, take a bubble bath write in your journal, eyes will glaze over. Because we all know that it's beyond bubble baths. We know there's many things we have to do individually, but there's also many things that need to happen in our teams, workplaces, society as a whole to actually give value to the work of caregiving. And that's true in families. Caregiving as mothers and parents is undervalued. Caregiving of our aging parents who need us is undervalued. And then caregiving in society and professions that are care oriented is also undervalued. They're the lowest paying jobs, they're the very overwork jobs. I could say more, but I'll stop.

So the question to how you get someone to think journaling can matter is first a question of how they matter. how they deserve to take that time for themselves for quiet self-reflection where they do not have to care for someone else. They have permission to stop and care for themselves, to take time to reflect, time to process their own emotions, time to fill their own cup, and to then know that journaling is an evidence-based practice that can actually help them accomplish those goals. Because no one wants to think, oh, I'm just sitting here rambling on a page. What good could this do? I have laundry to do or I have to get this report done or I have whatever. We have to know its value.

And that's why I like to present the research on the healing power of journaling and writing so that people can feel confident, okay, I'm going to take 10 or 15 minutes. I'm going to write about my thoughts. I'm going to write about my feelings. I'm going to write about what went well today and I'm not going to think that's a complete waste of time. I'm going to know that that was just an investment in filling my own well. That was an investment in my self-care, my well-being. And the other thing that happens is we have a lot of messaging and training workshops are filled with this. I've been at them as a participant to take care of yourself so you can take care of people better. So you can be a better parent, a better social worker, a better spouse.

Still, the focus of care is on how it will equip us to care for other people versus we deserve our self-care for our own selves. It does not have to be contingent on how it makes us even better at giving to other people.

So there's a lot around the language and the messaging about self-care that needs a lot of refinement, in my opinion. And that because that refinement matters because it helps people

say, I have the right to do this. I don't have to work you know 15 hours and sleep two hours to deserve arrest or deserve a day off or deserve 15 minutes to write in my journal.

And so much of what is fostered in the systems of care is that you've got to do this to earn that. And part of the earning is you've got to burn yourself out or come darn close to it to deserve this day off. And now we call them mental health days because people have to feel unraveled or unwell enough to declare that they're taking this day.

It's like, actually, what about that day before we have to get to that point to prevent that?

So we have a lot of work to do and I love bringing people into communities to journal together. and social workers and helping professionals and healthcare professionals and teams so that they can begin to take that time together. Take that pause together. Nothing brings me more joy than being in a room of helping professionals and seeing them at the table, heads down, pens moving, and they're writing about something they're proud of, of what they've done in their career in the last week. And all the pens are moving and sometimes you'll see people start to cry and you'll see shoulders drop and you'll see smiles come.

And then we'll invite them to turn to each other and share what it was like to do that writing. And if they would like to, they could share the writing. They don't have to. That's their own personal private writing. And all of a sudden, they're not alone and it's normalized and they see not only what each other goes through, but they also see how writing helped them in that moment. They see how five minutes of journaling made them feel better. They see how five minutes of journaling made the person sitting beside them feel better.

So I don't have to say taking time to journal will help you feel better, help you feel replenished. I just have to have them see what just happened from their own experience. And that stays with a person far more than someone saying, you should journal it'll help you with self-care. It's like, let's do this thing called journaling, and then let's see how you feel. And then let's talk about it. And then everything that's needed to happen happened all through the process.

Claudia Scheidemann

Thank you so much for also bringing up this systemic question, because I think this is one of the most important ones when we talk about burnout of caregiving persons. And what I find so strange is really this two sides of the same medal on on one hand what used labeled as selflessness expectation. And on the other hand is that caregiving is undervalued. I mean, this doesn't make any sense when once you start thinking about, and very often it's something that is not I think conscious, it's just something, this is how we do things.

And that's why it's so important to also start this discussion that the expectations are not okay. And these are not badges of honor. And I mean, we all know these burnout stories as some kind of a hero's journey. I overcame it and afterwards I learned so much. And the sentence is almost, well, that was worth it. And this is not what happens for all people. And I think we need also to address that sometimes there's no coming back from burnout.

Lynda Monk

You come back as a different version of yourself. And sometimes there's been a lot of costs along the way, including marriages, careers, high exactly, health first and foremost. Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

Sometimes you don't come back to your old ability to work because that's just no longer possible. And I think it's really important to address these almost hidden costs of this thing well, almost chic while I went through my burnout. I hope we have this phase now behind us. So thank you for also really this systemic thing is I think one of the important things we need to address.

Lynda Monk

Absolutely. And in fact if we just leave it at the individual level we're doing a disservice because we're blaming the victims. We're saying if you just eat healthy or take a bath, write in a journal, not to minimize any of these things we can do for self-care. But if we say that's all it takes, when we know that is not all it takes, we are doing a disservice.

It is a shared responsibility between individuals, of course, we are the ones who have to take care of ourselves. But **we take care of ourselves in context. In context of our resources, our families, our workplaces, society,** it is a person in environment way of understanding complex issues have complex pictures and they have complex solutions. They're not just this one single thing. They're multifaceted.

And yes, there's the individual self-care picture. But that happens in relation to how does the workplace honor self-care? How are things like work-life balance looked after, leadership, supervision, enough resources including human resources and financial resources to do the job, clear job descriptions, clear work hours, clear mentoring. There's a long, long list of things that make for a resilient and healthy caregiving organization. And the more those things are in place, the more resilience the individuals working in those environments will have and the more protection from burnout they will have.

Whether they're running around the block or writing in a journal or not. Again, not to minimize those things, but these systemic issues are very formative and influential on the risk for burnout. So we, of course, this is a podcast on writing. But I think it's relevant because there can be barriers to get to our writing. There can be barriers of time, of thinking that it matters, of seeing how it fits in the overall picture of our lives, our wellness, our creativity, our happiness. And it takes a declaration to do anything on our own behalf, including writing.

And the more frivolous we might think it is, the more barriers we might have to getting to it. So when we know it's actually very valuable and also we remove the guilt from it. I have so many people, especially women who will say I feel too guilty. I have a lot of avid journal writers in my world because of what I do. I lead a journaling organization, so they already know the value of journaling for the most part, and many of them have been doing it for decades. But I also am with many people who've never journaled before. And they're coming to this journaling workshop because someone put it on and said you should go their workplace or what have you.

And they've never done it. They think it's something a teenage girl does with a lock and key and they don't even know why it's happening in their workplace. And so I have to have those conversations. And so there's that people understanding the value of it. And that value because it's so simple. **I think sometimes we could think well it's so simple how can it be so helpful? Isn't that the good news? It is very simple to do. It doesn't cost a lot.** There's not too many access barriers as long as you have literacy and you can use words and you have language which is

many people as long as you can afford a pen and a piece of paper which is most people and you can find those about.

I think because it's so simple and it really is in the palm of our own hands, we have agency over it. We don't have to be able to afford that gym membership, that massage person, all the other things that can be helpful to our mind, body, heart and spirit, the many things we can do for self-care. Journaling can be done in a cafe, it can be done on a bus, it can be done waiting for an airplane. So flexible, five minutes of it can have benefit. And three minutes of it can have benefit. So you don't need a lot of time, you don't need a lot of money. It's very flexible, very adaptable, and it gives great gains, especially over time. So it is easy, and it's like a little magic wand. So we all need a little more magic. So just go for it.

Claudia Scheidemann

Magic of Journaling. - I like that.

Lynda Monk

I'd be a good book title, Claudia. Yeah. Write that down.

Claudia Scheidemann

I'm writing it down.

Michaela Muschitz

Something I wrote down, what you said before is you want to somehow create an ecosystem of goodness. And I really like this picture of how can we build communities where we can support each other? Remind each other of being of the magical moments we do have, of what we transformed today, how we managed to survive sometimes it feels like that. How did we manage to survive those days?

And I do think this picture of creating an ecosystem of goodness is something that inspires me and gives me hope. Because when you look around, sometimes it's like, it's not always a funny place over here and there's so many obstacles. But when you create those vision of an ecosystem of goodness, this really is a beautiful picture, a magical picture for me. And so my question is, how can we do that? How can we create this ecosystem of goodness?

Lynda Monk

Yeah. It happens in ourself. You know, we start with staying tethered to that feeling of goodness, that feeling of hope, that feeling of optimism. And we're living in very complex times at this time in human history. And I don't need to say more about that. And so: There are many things challenging that. There are so many things that are elevating stress, anxiety, fear, uncertainty.

These things are directly related to diminished mental health for many people. And so we have this in the collective. We have a lot more people are lonely. I just heard a study yesterday that was about how one in five people don't feel like they have someone they could turn to. if they needed to talk to somebody, that's a compelling statistic. So are our statistics on loneliness.

Our population health has lots of metrics that's showing some decline. And so I don't say that to depress any of us or listeners, but to say that this ecosystem of goodness is needed now as much or maybe more than ever.

And I think that one of the ways that we meet despair individually and collectively. And it's all around us. It's in the pulse of life right now on our planet, economically, politically, climate decline. Anywhere you turn, there's crisis and disarray. [Right.]

And we mustn't pretend there isn't. It's not rose colored glasses head in the sand. I'll just do my gratitude journaling for five minutes and the political systems of the world will reorient. No. There's great collapse and chaos happening. However, how do I stay grounded? How do I stay tethered? How do I stay well? One page at a time or whatever one's practices, meditation practice, gratitude practice, prayer practice, yoga practice. There's many practices that try to keep us in the energy of goodness, in this ecosystem of goodness. Journaling and our personal writing is just one of many.

And that's why there are meditation groups. Meditation is a solitary practice of sitting quietly, et cetera. And yet people gather around the world to do it. Journaling is a private solitary practice. Writing is a private solitary practice. And yet some of what I spend every part of every day of my life is trying to bring us into community to do it. Because it's community that gives that fuels our creativity, community that fuels our sense of belonging and becoming and that we're not alone and we can do this. And you know, an ecosystem of goodness isn't just for an ecosystem of one, it's an ecosystem of many.

And so I think we do this by fostering community, even small communities in our living rooms, in our workplaces. We strengthen our strengths. I remember doing team building workshops and they wanted me to come in and fix this problem or that problem for a team of social workers. I said, well, can I have your permission to come in and talk about what this team feels is going well? What they appreciate about each other? I would rather strengthen strengths than try to fix weaknesses because that's already what everybody talks about, this conflict and that conflict. And those things, of course, need to be addressed. But everything I do, I try to think, well, what's the thread that can be pulled, that pulls towards that strength, that goodness, that resilience, that hope, that optimism? Because actually, those are the skills we need to build.

We don't really need to build, people can actually complain and worry and ruminate and be upset. Quite easily, they don't really need any encouragement. And it's like back to the burnout, systemic issues. People don't need encouragement to work longer hours. They need encouragement to go home on time, to take a lunch break, to take their coffee break. We need a manager who says, wow, I really love how you role model taking your lunch every day and honoring work life balance by going home on time.

We hear, oh, thanks for working over, thanks for ... We actually reward the behaviors, we actually need less of. And so an ecosystem of goodness is actually shining a light on the light, shining a light on what feels good, shining a light on joy, shining a light on health, shining a light on love, shining a light on community. Because it's actually the light, I think we're in a time in history where those of us who can actually hold on to some light and lightness and goodness, we have big work to do because we have a tidal wave trying to pull humanity in other directions of conflict and hatred and racism and all of these oppressive models and structures. And so those of us

who can actually, truly keep some light in our beings, in our hearts, in our hopefulness, we have big work to do. And that to me is that ecosystem of goodness.

How in my day do I smile at someone? How do I bring people together focused on something that's good and strengthening? How do the words that I send in my email bring maybe a little bit of bright light to someone when they read it? It's being very intentional with our own light, our own goodness. And knowing that if I put that out and this person over here does this and both of you put that out with your podcast and all the ways this is happening, that that is actually a powerful force. It's not small to be kind. It's not small to be compassionate and gracious and good.

And there's so much permission in our world for bad behavior right now. We have world leaders with very bad behavior and we have these corporate structures with very poor behaviors. And so these poor behaviors are having the velocity of their own, and it's emboldening other people to be. It's emboldening road rage. It's emboldening people to talk very rudely to each other. It's rippling down. I see it. We all see it. So our work to do is that ecosystem of goodness is emboldening the behaviors we want more of. Thank you. I appreciate you. I valued the time we just had this conversation.

You know, we want to embolden what's good. And that is another miracle in our midst. Another magical, another magical. More magic.

Claudia Scheidemann

We all need more magic. And I think it's infectious. It's infectious to listen to you. And it puts out a different narrative. It's different. You just said that this ecosystem fuels creativity. And there's so many ideas about this lone genius who sits at his desk, pulls out the knife and writes with its own blood, and you have to suffer. And in loneliness, there is it.

So this picture of the story or the narrative of the lonesome rider. And I think we need something different. And I for myself can say that for a very, very, very long time in my life I was more on the side of, okay, I have to do things and I have to do them alone. There are reasons for that, but it was actually writing that showed me that there's something different possible.

And I resisted it in the beginning. I didn't like writing in groups. I think I said that several [Lynda: I didn't either.] I said, let me alone with my thoughts, it's enough there, but and it took really, it took years and many, many positive experiences. And to experience this, oh, there's somebody else who can connect with what I just said about my suffering. And it's not to be ridiculed, but it's such a basic experience which we don't have very often sometimes. I didn't have that very often in my life before.

So it's also through writing and writing groups. And this is some kind of conversion story you can even say, because now I'm really an advocate of, okay, please come together in writing, don't do that alone. This writing alone together, what your book is about. And it's really this coming together in community finding out, oh, there are so many things that connect us.

I hope there are way more things that connect us than divide us. And this is something we can explore through writing.

Lynda Monk

Yeah, thank you for sharing that, Claudia. And you're not alone and I think when we come together to write, we also have to have safe environments to do that. Environments that respect privacy, that are skillful, that don't have forced sharing, that have elements of containment so that people can be in their own experience of their own writing in the energy and support of other human beings.

And so there's a lot of skill that goes into bringing together people to do the intimate work of personal writing in community so that it can happen well and it can be a positive experience for people and it can be valuable to introverts, extroverts, people who want to share, people who don't want to share. silences of voice, there's a lot of elements to create good, safe, and strong containers for the work of writing in community, which is something I'm very interested in and spend a lot of time learning and teaching about.

And so it's not either or. It's not this quiet personal practice or going in community. Here's this private rigorous practice I have that I can count on and here's a space where I can deepen it, be inspired about it, see other people who do it, and that just sort of elevates. I remember that quote, a rising tide lifts all boats. It's been accredited to different people over the years, but nonetheless the sentiment. And I think there is a rising tide when we write together and someone might be having a very difficult time and that's what they're writing about and someone might be exhilarated about something. And it's all okay.

And together this act of writing, we've just, you know, helped raise a tide that we can all benefit from. And again, that's that ecosystem of goodness. It's sort of that what, there's something that each individual can gain from collective experiences that are done well and, you know, skillfully. Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

Thank you. - I would love to also explore your book because it has a topic that is special. And the title is "The Adoptee's Guide to Healing, Wholeness and Growth". And can you just tell us a little bit about the book and how you wrote it? What's the story behind the book?

Lynda Monk

Sure, sure, thank you. Yes, well, it started out as a journal and became a book. I was fortunate to get a contract with a publisher too, I was asked if there was a journal I might like to create for obvious reasons all my work in the journaling space and I've made lots of different guided journals and journaling for self-care and goal setting. I love making guided journaling experiences. I just love creating and that's one of the things I like to create. And I just sort of off the cuff said, well, I'd really love to make a journal for fellow adoptees. I've really used journal. I'm an adoptee, obviously, and I've used journaling not just for burnout prevention, but helping me all through understanding my experience as an adoptee, through all my reunion experiences of searching for and finding biological family.

I mean, my journal has been like a companion, you know, like my faithful golden retriever, you know, alongside this, you know, experience of being an adoptee. And so I started just creating journaling prompts and one thing led to another. I thought, well, I should have some of my own

story in here, so I did a “From the pages of my journal” sections. Then I thought, well, there needs to kind of be these touchstones. This journal has to take people through a journey, a process that moves from some of that origin story to all the different things that can be part of an adoptees experience, including grief and all kinds of things.

But I want to move to an empowerment story, one of agency, because as adoptees our stories are given to us, and they're often given to us with lots of unanswered questions, and we're separated from our identity. So there's a real reclaiming, a restorying of our lives that's part of our healing and empowerment journey as adoptees. So that's what I say.

Claudia Scheidemann

It's a very complex story.

Lynda Monk

It is. And I've been working on my adoptee memoir since I met my biological mother. And that was 26 years ago. So as you can hear, I've been working on and off and largely off for that period of time. But it's never left me. Right here, I can see it, well, it's behind a curtain, but on this shelf are bins of thousands of pages I've done on this memoir. And I've been to writing retreats, and I've been in writing groups, and I've had parts of it edited, but what I haven't done is complete it. And just when I was about to do that, I derailed and wrote this book instead, The Adoptees Guide to Healing, Wholeness and Growth. But what writing this book has done, and it became a guide instead of a journal because it has these 49 healing touchstones, and it just became too big to be a journal.

And thankfully my publisher kept tracking with that and saying yes. And what it's done is it allowed me to, in a less threatening way, dip my toes into writing about my adoption story and actually thinking about adoption, not just for myself. I'm learning so much talking to other adoptees and adoption serving organizations and professionals, which I didn't give any thought to at all. I know that sounds very naive, but I really was just focused on writing it. I didn't really think, well, what will happen when it's published? And I've been on our national radio talking about it and podcast talking about it. And I really didn't talk about being an adoptee. I just was one. And I talked about it through my own small circles where I would get support for writing the memoir.

But what this has done is introduced me that there's a whole adoption space. There are people out here championing the rights of adoptees, helping educate adoptive parents, systems of care. And it's like, wow, wow, I could maybe like have a voice here that maybe could be helpful to others and also to myself and my own ongoing growth journey and to my family. And I was recently speaking with my birth mother who just came through a very serious health situation and she'll be 76. And she just last week shared with me that one of her dying wishes is to, she's not dying at the moment. But you know, she said she will eventually, she's 76. We all will eventually.

But she said her dying wish is to read my memoir. And I've already been quite sad that my father passed away as I mentioned from Alzheimer's and my mom no longer knows who I am. And they were two of my most important readers. I really wanted my parents to read this book. And they're an audience that are now lost. And she would be the other person and my biological father who I

found, I learned his identity in the past few years by the time I came to meet that family. He had already died. So she's the last parent standing if you wish who would be able to read a book.

And I surely and the fact that she said it's her dying wish to read it and has given me full blessing to write whatever I want because of course with memoir you're never just writing your own story which is why they take years to write because you have to figure out how you tell and don't tell you know other people's stories and her full blessing to just write it. And she was very supportive. I send her the manuscript for this because there's some of her story in this and our first meeting story and her pregnancy story. And she gave full blessing for it.

It's really freed me up. I think, okay, this is her dying wish. And she said, I can write whatever I want. there really are no obstacles now beyond myself. So, which of course, as we know, is the good news and the bad news all at once. But I am actively working on adjusting my schedule to come back to the memoir and wholeheartedly work towards completing it and publishing it. And maybe I can be on your podcast again when that happens. And I can say what it was like to finally finish it.

So, yeah. And this book's getting lots of great reviews and I'm so encouraged that it's been helpful to fellow adoptees, they're loving it and people who aren't adoptees are saying they love the prompts and they've been getting so much out of it. Friends who bought it just because they love me and they're not adoptees at all but wanted to learn a little bit more about my experience. But they've said they're learning so much about their own experience. I wrote it for adoptees. and people in the adoption triangle, which includes adoptive parents, birth parents, and of course the whole world of adoption serving organizations.

So now I'm on the next leg of the journey, which is promoting it, talking about it, hope helping it, stewarding it out to reach the people that are meant to use it and be with it. And I hope it will benefit lots of people. Yeah. And it benefited me to write it because I I was like, well, okay, what do I want to say about this? And in the first, I'm still figuring out what I want to say about this, but each time I get the privilege of saying anything at all, mostly it's a book that helps people. The last, I'm writing a course that I hope can flow from the book, which I'm calling *Remember Your Radiance*, because that is the invitation. To remember that you're enough, you're lovable, you're worthy, and being an adoptee is just one part of who we are. Yes, it's a formative story. It's often an early trauma. And we are more than that. We are a whole story. And adoption isn't a one-time story. It's not you're adopted, given up and there you go. It's with you your whole life through, every birthday, your own children being born, your own ways and relationship. And it's a very formative experience. Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

And I think that's where ... why people can connect even if they're not adoptees, but because in the end it's about familial, family relationships.

Lynda Monk

Yeah.

Claudia Scheidemann

How do they look like? How can they change? How do I integrate what you said before, feelings of grief or anger into it? And I think that's something other people we can connect to.

Lynda Monk

Yeah, because it's part of being human. One of the things I talk about in the book is the presence of grief and gratitude. As an adoptee, I always felt I should be very grateful that I was born in the first place that could have been otherwise. That I was adopted by people who love me as their own. There were so many things to be grateful for, and I always had this quiet grief: Why was I given away? Like where are these other people? Even now when I'm with my birth mother, I'm so happy to be with her and I'm so sad when we say goodbye. Both things are true.

And so the book is, there's unique things about the adoption experience, but it's a universal thing. Many people deal with things around abandonment or maybe not being able to be with both parents or... Or they've lost people through death. And all of our families shape us. And we all have parts of ourselves that we want to come into wholeness with or healing with to be the best versions of ourselves with the experiences we've gone through. So I wrote it with adoptees in mind, but these are universal human experiences.

That's why we keep writing. And I remember being at a memoir writing workshop with Sandra Protella (?), a Canadian author years ago at Hollyhock and Cortes Island here in BC, and she said that when we write our own stories, you know, honestly and truthfully enough, that we touch something in the universal human story. So I always think my work as a writer, particularly with memoir, is just do my very best, like to tell you know, the heart of my own story and trust that that can maybe touch the heart of a reader. And I just, I just focus on that. So that's more than enough to focus on, as we all know.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah, it is.

Michaela Muschitz

And we would love to have you again as a podcast guest when your memoir is finished.

Lynda Monk

Thank you. Thank you. I'll look forward to another motivation. Yes, mother's dying wish and Michaela and Claudia inviting me back to their podcast. We all need our reasons for carrying on and doing the things we say we want to do and external motivators are good ones because internal motivators can only take us so far.

Michaela Muschitz

Another reason that's something. Yeah, another reason. Yeah. And there's something we talked before we started the recording that you are working on something else, you said. And when I mention it here, then it's another motivation to really do it. Do you want to tell us about what you are planning to do or even start it to do?

Lynda Monk

Yes, I am launching a YouTube channel. which probably doesn't sound very too tough to do. You just have to upload some things. But as you know, launching a podcast, launching anything that's about being visible. It takes a certain amount of courage and it also takes effort. There's some tech things to do and all the things. But I've decided to launch youtube. I have a YouTube channel, there's a few videos on it.

But my motivation is that one of the things ... you ask in the pre-questions for this interview about what journaling prompts I like and I love prompts, but one I've been working with lately and repeatedly is **what is emerging in my life right now?** What is emerging in my life right now?

And I just submitted a chapter for a life writing academic journal that's being published out of the UK and it was like writing a master's thesis doing this chapter, but my chapter and the premise I sort of advocated for in the chapter is that **journaling is a way of becoming who you are.** That it's more than something we do as a hobby or like making a card or something.

It's actually a tool in self-development. **And I truly believe I would be a different person if I wasn't a journal writer than the version of myself I am as a result.** of such. And I know many, and all of us who do this, we all nodding our heads because we understand what that means.

And so that question of what's emerging for me right now I've been journaling with. In part, because of this chapter I've been writing, I've just been trying to stay present to my own experience how journaling helps me become who I am. And what's been coming out in my own journaling in the last number of months is this desire to be more visible because and also a desire to not be more visible. I've had because a lot of my work is in in the journaling community that people are members of, but it doesn't reach beyond the people who have, you know, paid to be a member in the IAJW, for example, which is a low, you know, entry point.

But that's where I spend a lot of my time offering workshops and writing circles and so forth. I said, well. And so often people say, oh, it'd be so great if other people could hear this. Or it'd be great if I could share this with my family. And I thought, that's kind of a calling forth. So what's a way I could share that would be more visible? That isn't behind a membership paywall if you want to call it that. And just put some things out there, put ideas out there. Podcast guesting, you know, having a podcast, everyone. And I thought, well, I love interviewing people. I interview people every month in our journaling community for our journal talks.

I thought I could start a YouTube channel. I've been playing with a podcast, but I really, I wanted the element of video as well. I'll probably repurpose some of, like I'll probably do both a podcast, but my commitment to myself is I'm launching a podcast in in September. And I know you will be listening to this in October. And I've committed to doing a YouTube video a week for one year.

Claudia Scheidemann

Wow.

Lynda Monk

Because I believe that consistency is really something that helps with anything we try to do. So if I want to write a book, I can't just write, you know, I have to say I'm going to write in that book

every day to get it done, or if I'm going to get stronger, I need to do physical exercise regularly for an extended period of time.

**It's not the one and dones that change our life.** I mean, some things you get married, it's one day. And you have a baby, it's one moment. There are one and dones, but I mean, generally speaking, not one and done, but one and forever change, that consistency helps us get traction. And it also says I'm committed to this. And so that's what I'm doing. So I'm going to have some subsections on it. I'm going to have a piece like for fellow adoptees and journaling at large and a right to restore part of the channel that's around journaling for burnout prevention.

I basically want to bring all my areas of passion and knowledge into the channel and hope that it will help people. Yeah. And I hope it will get fun to do.

Claudia Scheidemann

I'm sure it will help, and we're very much looking forward to the first videos.

Lynda Monk

Thank you. I'm going to do it right here with my real bookshelf. People always ask me if this is a, you know, a background. But it's a real bookshelf that things fall off of. It's not as neat to the left. There's a few, yes, stacks that don't look as organized as the books behind me. We all have the out-of-view part of our lives.

Claudia Scheidemann

So you know the most important thing for YouTube videos already - camera angle.

Lynda Monk

I have two sons, 19 and 20, 21 now, and they're both very good at. ...My one son actually built these bookshelves, and him and my husband put all these books away when I had to go suddenly to see my mom and I was part way through an office change. I came home and these shelves were installed and the books were here. It was such a labor of love. And my other son, he got my microphone set up and the ring light and the camera.

And so it's a team effort to do anything we do in this life. So I appreciate my family for all their support. And my one son, we go for regular walks together with our dog. And he's been telling me I should have a YouTube channel since he was about 16 and he just turned 21. So I said, if for no other reason to honor my dear son Jackson and his good advice, I must proceed. Again, an external motivator.

Claudia Scheidemann

No, not doing. It's not possible anymore.

Lynda Monk

Well, you know what it takes. You've both been brave and started your podcast and been offering it now for a while. And I can't understand all of it because it's in German, but I did listen to your other English-speaking guests, Sandra Marinella and Deb.

Michaela Muschitz

Deborah Ross.

Lynda Monk

Deborah Ross "Your Brain On Ink" author. And they were wonderful interviews, and I'm truly honored to be a guest. Thank you for having me.

Michaela Muschitz

Thank you. But you've been talking about books. When you look on yourself, is there a book, a favorite book? You say, say, this is the one that inspired me that is my magic book.

Lynda Monk

Well, as you can see, I have a love for books. My husband would say an addiction. But we won't worry about semantics. I love that that's a semantic. And he may be right, but I really treasure all books. I think every book is such an offering in our world. And I love reading them, buying them, and now writing them is a joy as well.

So what I'd like to share is the book that I'm reading in the moment. Because I always say my favorite book is the one I'm reading right now. And the book I'm reading right now is by **Amie McNee**. It's called **We Need Your Art, Stop Messing Around and Make Something** is the subtitle. And I had the joy of meeting Amy last year at the Barcelona Journaling Festival.

Claudia Scheidemann

Oh, wow.

Lynda Monk

I was the keynote speaker. which was a great joy. And I spoke about the power of journaling in community to kick off the festival. And she was another of the keynote speakers, and she spoke about how the world needs your art. And I came back, we didn't actually get to talk, but we were swirling around each other the whole festival.

And I just had passed her and said, you have any more of your books 'cause she had done a book launch event before the festival started. and I hadn't arrived to Barcelona yet. So that was our brief exchange, but we each saw one another's talks. And I came back to my seat during the festival, which my husband also attended. He videotaped. He was the video recorder for the talk.

And she inscribed the book, and she said, "Linda, I hope our paths continue to cross your work, your art is holy, the world is indebted." And it was such a beautiful inscription. [Oh.] And I've been, and I hadn't read it yet and I just recently picked it up. And because I've invited her to, I'm hosting my second annual World Journaling Day, January 11th, 2027. And everyone's invited. It's a free event.

And I've invited her to be a speaker and I haven't heard back from her yet. But the reason beyond it's the book I'm reading and therefore it's my favorite book, what I love about this book is the value that Amy gives to our art making and how it actually matters.

That it's very easy to backburner our writing or our painting or our self-expressive acts because they may not be as valuable as caregiving or some other thing we might be doing. And she makes a call that it's actually needed and that our art in the world and it fits with this message of an ecosystem of goodness with, you know, that our art is part of that ecosystem.

And in her book, she has big, you can't see it because you're hearing an audio right now. But if you held up this book, you would see she has pages that she does and big fills the whole page with a few words. And you could read those and get a lot out of this book. **You have been seduced into believing you are inconsequential. It is a lie. We need you, we need your art.**

She has lots of things that are about the responsible thing because she says people always say, well, have to be responsible to our, we do, of course. But she says **the responsible thing to do is to chase your creative calling.** She really empowers and calls forth, like this is actually important work to do.

She says, we think that art merely decorates the world, but it changes it. Which I absolutely believe. [Beautiful]. So what I'm really loving about this book and she also takes on things like perfectionism. And that's something I often have to deal with. I'm a virgo and I just really like and I like quality and I like to get it right.

But I sometimes put a little bit too much like pressure on myself or like can procrastinate through perfectionism, things like that. **Perfectionism will ruin your relationship with yourself and block you from your brilliance.** So she says a lot of like bold things that when you get them, you're like, yeah, that sounds right.

And the book calls you forth. And it makes you feel like it's not just, you know, I should make my art like, I gotta do this right now. It feels like an urgent important thing to do, and I love it about the book, and I love that about her and her way in the world.

Claudia Scheidemann

It's very convincing. I've also on my shelf. I'm not through yet, but it's because it's really, it has an impact.

Lynda Monk

It does.

Claudia Scheidemann

It's really like something I couldn't read just through in one go because well.

Lynda Monk

It's very confronting. Actually. I think really calling you forth and help, you know, it's a real call and a way to get over ourselves and the obstacles we might have to being brave and putting ourselves out there and being visible with things like a YouTube channel and a podcast and a book and they're all our art forms.

Speaking is an art, writing is an art, you know, **living authentically is an art** and making our mark, you know, what will the future find? Yeah, we have to make it so it can be found. And the island

that that workshop was on with Christina Baldwin, it came to me part way through our time together, was Ripby Island, which is in the states near Seattle.

Claudia Scheidemann

Yeah.

Lynda Monk

See, that's how the mind works. It might not get something in the moment, but it a little come. Same with writing, we just got to stick with it. You know, **the nugget might not come here and then, but then you just keep writing. Just keep swimming. There it is.**

Michaela Muschitz

I love that. Nemo, keep swimming, keep writing. I always end my blog articles with keep writing.

Lynda Monk

Yay, yeah, yeah, yeah. **Because it's the keeping going that actually creates the magic.**

Michaela Muschitz

Right.

Lynda Monk

We can start an awful lot of things. And we can think about starting an awful lot of things. Actually when we do it and keep going, now we've hit the sweet spot. That's the magic.

Michaela Muschitz

Yeah. I would say thanks a lot for this magic you sent over the ocean here to us. And thanks to all those inspiring thoughts. And let's start creating this ecosystem of goodness together.

Lynda Monk

Yeah, we already are.

Michaela Muschitz

Right.

Claudia Scheidemann

Thank you very much.

Lynda Monk

Thank you. Go well, both of you.