

WRITING AS A HEALING TOOL

By Jane Davis

“Not all writers use writing as a healing tool, “ I heard someone say. It took me by surprise. I had never thought of that. I just figured writers, in general, utilized the tool available for accessing deep truths. Before I ever earned the label “writer.” I recently found a scrap of paper tucked away in a drawer with my handwriting. “I developed writing out of pain and never shared it because of shame.” Today it is taped to my computer so I can remember. Remember the pain of writing from my heart. Remember the fear of writing from my heart. And, remember the incredible healing and release that also comes from that sort of vulnerable expression.

Years ago, my sister was given specific instruction, “In case anything ever happens to me, before you mourn, get my poetry and writings and destroy them” With great trust I told her where it was. What I was really scared of was that someone might read my writing and “know” what I was really thinking and feeling. They would know a part of me that comes out through my fingers sometimes like magic, sometimes like vomiting. They would know...me.

The first thing I ever had published was on the front page of a section of the Sunday New York Times. When I saw Mike Tyson’s photo and headline, “Mike Tyson Guilty of Rape!” plastered on the front page of the Atlanta Journal Constitution my heart exploded with words talking about the angry little boy inside the man and what role did society play in creating the myth. They poured out of me and I faxed the piece, handwritten, to the Sports Editor who was covering Mike Tyson. That was on a Tuesday. The following Sunday I was in print. While I was very excited to get published I also felt very vulnerable. I was scared of being judged for my thoughts. I was afraid of being attacked. And I was very humbled to that millions of people were reading these simple but powerful words that come from my heart. But, I got through it. I began to pursue other outlets for writing. I began to get published - again. And again. And again. Each time I wrote an “opinion” piece of some sort I wanted to take it back. An editor who was particularly supportive of my writing would say, “Sorry” each time I would call him and say, “I made a mistake in sending that to you!”

Healing was happening. Through my writing I began gaining a confidence with my inner reflection. Things that I might have kept quiet about were coming out of me in words on a page. When I wrote creative fact I was freed of something. I worried about some of the things because it often involved other people and I didn’t want to expose anyone else. My father once said to me after reading my manuscript, “I found myself wanting to defend myself and say “NO, that’s not how it was!” but then I remembered that it was your experience of things.” That encouragement was very helpful. I began using this medium as a healing tool with others. I do a lot of work in the prisons and with kids-at-risk. I facilitate writing and meditation groups with those populations. No one ever is obligated to share but amazingly enough; with one exception I can’t recall anyone not sharing. People want to be loved, accepted, and known for who we are. When write from our hearts, we really put ourselves out there.

One of the prisoner’s wrote the following to the assignment: Write “I am” ten times in a column. Then I instructed them to go back and fill in the blanks. He wrote:

I am unhappy with myself a lot. I am responsible for hurting people. I am a felon. I am scared. I am not a good role model for my kids. I am depressed. I am still blaming myself for everything. I am angry with myself. I am trying to take responsibilities seriously. I am going to work on this crap. I am a rapist, but I am human.

I always tell people there is a tremendous healing that takes place when we write out inner thoughts, desires and fears on paper. It brings reality to the fore. It allows us to deal with things that we could easily keep hidden. Something happens bringing forth words. Our truths. While it may be uncomfortable or even threatening to do so, it also is a tool of tremendous curative power and inner growth.

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