

## Gratitude Journals

by Beverly Denver

As long as I can remember I have been a scribe. When I was a young girl, my words were kept under lock and key in cutesy childhood diaries. As a young adult, I became more addicted to record keeping. It seemed my daily entries mirrored the frantic life I lived; my words found their way into spiral notebooks and yellow legal pads — to whatever was handy! But then, about 20 years ago, the process of putting words to paper took on more significance. To pay homage, I started buying beautifully bound books to contain my scribbling.

Over time, my habit of journal writing has become somewhat ceremonial. First thing every morning — immediately after awakening — I snuggle up on the sofa, sip strong dark coffee and, with a beautiful fountain pen in hand, jot down random thoughts, as quickly as they enter my head. Routinely, I pen at least three pages per day.

I started writing in the morning more than 10 years ago at the suggestion of creative guru Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist's Way*. It was (and still is) her contention that writing in a journal at the start of the day is better than writing at night. Doing so, she says, incites more free-flow thought and fewer recordings of the day's events. Writing in the morning, she says, sparks creativity and reveals authenticity.

I have found all of this to be absolutely true — and life changing.

In the early days of my journal writing, I wrote at night. My entries were, more or less, agenda reports. I wrote about where I'd been and whom I saw. I was overly conscious of my use of words, lengths of sentences and structure of the paragraphs. I wrote as if the pages would be turned in the next day and graded by an English professor. Well-written, perhaps, but lacking. How I felt about my day, my activities or the people I shared time were suspiciously absent.

Things changed when I started writing in the morning. Perhaps because I was overly conscious of the time and my need to get on with my day, I found myself writing about what I was thinking or feeling. I wrote faster and in phrases. Single words showed up on the page. Words got underlined or written in bold letters. Lots of exclamation points appeared.

Often, the pages were my dumping ground:

“This is going to be a long, tough day. Overcommitted again! Need to get to the gym. No time. I hate being this busy!! I'm doing it again, putting myself last. Drats!!”

Recurring themes played out on the page, and as they did, I was forced to address various issues in my life. Working too much was one. Not making my own health a priority was another.

As I took stock of my own set of circumstances, my journal became the place I went to work things out, to make new commitments. Its pages became more hallowed ground.

I started to change and so too did the things I wrote about.

“I walked three miles today. YEA! My health is such a blessing. I love being a grandmother. Work is awesome! What a great vacation!”

The journaling I do today is more about what is right in my world than what is not. By the time I “talk” about all the things I am grateful for, the pages are filled, and I’m pumped to pursue my passions.

Ah, my journals! How I need and appreciate them! Blessedly, they bear witness to personal growth and gratitude and, increasingly, to heartfelt prayers of thanksgiving.

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