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Journaling at Midlife

Putting your life on paper can give you a sense of clarity

BY NANCY MONSON

Confession time: I have kept a journal since I was a teenager. I would never want anyone else to read what I've written, but when I look back on those pages, it helps me remember not only the details of my life, but also how I felt about people and circumstances. And it helps me see things in a new light and from a more seasoned perspective.

Maybe you have thought of journaling at some point in your life, but never got around to it or felt you weren't up to the task. Well, now's the time to pick up your pen and start writing! According to Gina Carroll, author of *A Story That Matters: A Gratifying Approach to Writing About Your Life*, journaling at midlife is an ideal way to work through important life events or come to terms with your past.

Getting Started

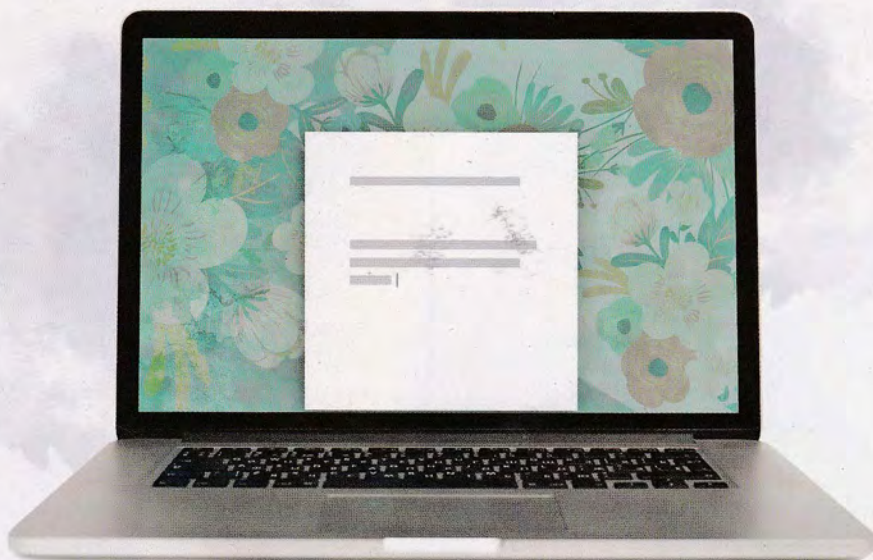
You can start journaling simply by writing down significant things that happen to you and how you feel about them. >



ART JOURNAL

Journaling doesn't always mean writing. In fact, it can even be considered an "art." Try doodling in the margins or adding background color to bring your pages to life.

GETTY IMAGES



Or you can do a life review, looking back at the ups and downs of your lifetime.

Actress Jane Fonda, author of *Prime Time: Making the Most of All of Your Life*, found doing a life review liberating. In 2011, she told USA TODAY, “The rap on me was there was no ‘there’ there. I was pretty much what my husbands wanted me to be. But when I did my life review, preparing for my 60s and writing my memoir, there were themes that ran through my life. ... I saw who I was, as opposed to who my husbands wanted me to be. I could own who I was.”

Another option, particularly if you feel overwhelmed or blocked, is to do “morning pages,” three pages of long-hand, stream-of-consciousness writings to access your creativity. These pages, the brainchild of creativity expert Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist’s Way*, are for your eyes only. They may be a jumbled mess, a laundry list of things

you need to do or the same phrase written over and over. They may even contain doodles and drawings. Do what it takes to break up your mental logjam.

Journaling Benefits

“It’s wonderful to have a creative outlet like journaling to provide structure, habit and ritual to your life,” particularly if you’re retired, notes Carroll. Creative outlets also provide an emotional release, she says: “There is something magical and enduring about the written word.”

Although you don’t have to share your journaling, Carroll actually advocates writing with the intention of passing your life stories on to others through bound or self-published books, a blog or other outlets.

“Writing to share your stories gives journaling a sense of urgency and purpose,” she says. “Your story is important to your family. ... Your story is the beginning of their story.” ■

JOURNALING 101:



- ▶ Decide if you prefer to write longhand or on the computer. If you take the handwritten route, buy yourself a lovely journal that you will enjoy writing in.



- ▶ Create a ritual to get into a thoughtful journaling mindset. Make yourself a cup of coffee or tea, light a candle or watch the sun come up before writing.



- ▶ Set up a regular time to journal (ideally, daily) and commit to that schedule.



- ▶ Pick a writing spot, so your brain knows that when you go there, it’s time to get working.



- ▶ Let the first draft flow without correction or perfectionism. If you plan to share the story, you can always edit later.

— Nancy Monson