

Spring 2008

# THRIVING

A JOURNAL OF WELL-BEING  
from **LESLIE TUCHMAN, MA MFT**  
11850 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 201  
Los Angeles, CA 90025  
310-562-6105  
[www.leslietuchman.com](http://www.leslietuchman.com)



## Top Five Reasons to Join a Creative Writing Therapy Group

by Leslie Tuchman

Creative writing therapy groups offer opportunities for connection, creativity and fun as well as a transformative and healing therapeutic experience.

This work is powerful. It is designed specifically for non-writers, although those of you who have done some journal writing or kept a diary in the past will find it challenging and healing as well.

Here are my five reasons to give it a try!

### 1. You want support from others as you move through life's inevitable transitions and challenges.

In therapeutic writing sessions we have the opportunity to come together in an emotionally safe place. We deepen our understanding of the emotional issues we are dealing with by sharing our personal stories. We read, discuss, share and write in a non-judgmental, therapeutic setting.

### 2. You want to invest in your personal growth, but money is an issue.

Therapy groups and support groups are a cost-effective way to access the support you are looking for. In addition to this, you will learn how to use writing as a therapeutic tool on your own whenever you want to process your thoughts and feelings. You can become your own healer!

### 3. You love words and you're looking for a creative and cathartic experience.

The Encarta Dictionary defines cathartic as "producing a feeling of being purified emotionally, spiritually, or psychologically as a result of an intense emotional experience or therapeutic technique."

When we keep our feelings and thoughts in our minds, we can feel a sense of isolation, lack of resolution and stress. The writing process allows us to cleanse ourselves and enjoy a sense of peace and calm.

### 4. You are ready to take some risks.

Sharing and writing in this group process makes it safe to broach topics that can be complex or difficult to talk about. Hearing others share about their lives helps us to realize that most of our challenges are universal. We feel less alone with our situations, and we have the opportunity to make new friends who are meeting some of the same challenges we are.

### 5. You crave deeper connections with other people.

Too often we get caught up in social niceties and surface-level conversations. Sometimes even our closest relationships don't give us the honest authentic conversation we desire, and it's not uncommon to feel isolated even when we are with our partners or spouses. A creative writing therapy group is a place to be seen, heard and understood.

If you're drawn to the idea of using creative writing as a therapeutic tool, a group setting might just be the perfect way to begin. Remember that poetry doesn't have to rhyme and that it's not the product that matters. What matters is the process of writing, discovering, growth and healing.

*There is an introductory creative writing therapy workshop on the last Sunday of every month. Please don't hesitate to call me at (310) 562-6105 or visit [www.leslietuchman.com](http://www.leslietuchman.com) for further information. \**

## After a Great Loss

by Perie Longo

from her book

*"With Nothing But Sky...*

*A journey through grief*

*After a great loss—love comes*

*from many directions*

*but often cannot find a way to get in*

*your eyes closed or*

*looking somewhere above it all*

*grasses sing your name*

*but all you hear is swish, swish*

*you think means say nothing*

*A heart breaks open in front of you*

*in the face of such a mirror*

*you look the other way*

*in shame*

*perhaps fear you will disappear*

*if you get too close to the fire again*

*or miss your song*

*Silly woman, it's been in you*

*all along*

*sing back*

*there is no ending*

\*

*(Reprinted with permission by Perie Longo, poet laureate of Santa Barbara, California, a PhD, MFT in private practice and Registered Poetry Therapist)*

## A Letter From Leslie Tuchman, MFT



I hope you enjoy this spring 2008 issue of Thriving and find the articles thought provoking!

April is National Poetry Month! My article, *Top Five Reasons to Join a Creative Writing Therapy Group*, is intended to encourage you to come and try one of my groups. Join me in exploring the delight and healing power of writing poetry. In 2007, I was the recipient of the Art Lerner Poetry Therapy Award.

I am a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist with a private practice in West Los Angeles. I offer counseling in most areas of mental health. (Please see my website: [www.leslietuchman.com](http://www.leslietuchman.com).)

I provide my clients with an opportunity to:

- Deal with anxiety and depression
- Improve couples' relationships
- Manage stress
- Overcome fears
- Resolve family-of-origin issues
- Deal with grief over loss of marriage or relationship, loss due to death of a loved one, loss due to life transitions and change (job, retirement, empty nest, midlife re-evaluations)

- Enhance personal growth
- Deal with all types of addictions and obsessive/compulsive behaviors
- Improve balance in intellectual, physical, spiritual and emotional areas of life.

Please don't hesitate to call if you have any questions or would like to make an appointment.

My office is located in West LA:  
11850 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 201  
Los Angeles, CA 90025  
Phone: (310) 562-6105.

## Are Your Assumptions Undermining You?

It's natural for us to instantly and automatically generate beliefs or assumptions about other people and our environment. Most likely it's a throw-back to our reptilian brain, which constantly scans to see if we are safe or in danger. Some assumptions are useful and necessary—such as assuming that night will follow day. However, other assumptions can undermine our well-being, our level of connection with others, and our overall success in the world. Take a look at the following questions to discover if your assumptions are undermining you:



### True False

#### Set 1

- 1. I base what I believe is possible on past experiences I've had.
- 2. I assume I already know what I do and do not like and therefore stick to what I know.
- 3. I tailor what I say and do based on expressions I see on other people's faces.
- 4. I don't tell certain people what I think or feel because I already know what they will say.
- 5. I can pretty well size people up within minutes of meeting them and then know what to expect.
- 6. How I relate to people is influenced by the way they look, dress and speak.
- 7. My opinions of others are influenced by what kind of work they do and where they are from.

#### Set 2

- 1. I regularly examine the assumptions I have about myself to determine whether my beliefs are holding me back.
- 2. I know that my truth is not necessarily other people's truth.
- 3. When I have an assumption about someone, I check it out with that person first before acting based on what I think is true.
- 4. I make time to clear the air with my loved ones and work-mates so that we don't just assume we're on the same page.
- 5. I consciously endeavor to open my heart to people I think are different from me—and am delighted when I discover we have more in common than I had imagined.
- 6. I make an effort to learn about differing beliefs and try to keep an open mind.
- 7. I cultivate curiosity as a way to counteract my natural human tendency to make assumptions.

If you answered true more often in Set 1 and false more often in Set 2, you may wish to examine how your assumptions are undermining your relationship with yourself, others, and life in general. Please don't hesitate to call if you'd like to explore this issue further.

## Making Medicine of Our Regrets

There is no such thing as a life without any regrets. We all have them. They may be small or large, recent or rooted in a long ago incident. Perhaps what most of us also have in common is wishing we didn't have them, wishing we hadn't made that choice, taken or not taken that life-changing action, or behaved inappropriately.

Perhaps we should not wish them away so quickly. Regret, according to Neal Roese, Ph.D., author of *If Only: How to Turn Regret*

*Into Opportunity*, is an essential mental skill. "Regret is useful," Roese writes, "for signaling to people that it's time to change their strategy."

When we allow our regretted choices to inform us and affect our behavior, they can be seen not only in the context of what is lost, but also what could be gained, and can serve as motivation to move forward.

Living with nagging regret as our daily companion, however, can become a burden that restricts our future and corrodes our self-esteem and emotional well-being. Even small regrets diminish our contentment and keep us from living in the present. In the case of crippling regrets, the results can be devastating. Psychologists have linked severe regret with a wide variety of mental and physical disorders, including sleep and mood problems, migraines, and skin conditions.

### Making Medicine of Regret

The pain of regret can be eased by taking certain steps:

**Clearly examine the regret.** Step back from the feelings and determine why you did what you did. How can you learn from your error? Was there

even an error to begin with? Did your action or non-action cause real harm to yourself or others? Is your dwelling on regret causing more harm than the action/inaction did?

If you regret a path not chosen, imagine how your life might be if you had chosen that path. Now, think of all the joys in your current life that you wouldn't have if you had taken the other path.

**Grieve, if necessary.** Fully experiencing the feelings of regret will

help you move forward. Tell the truth about your powerlessness to change the past, and empower yourself in the present by making peace with the regret. Write it down, burn the

paper or bury it in the earth, and then forget about it.

**Accept the way it is.** Recognize what you have learned and let it be final. Anything you have done is forgivable. Remember you're not alone; we've all made mistakes!

**Do something about it.** If the circumstances warrant it, ask for forgiveness and make amends. Take responsibility for anything you could have handled better. If you can, reverse the regretted behavior. No matter what your age, go back to school or pick up that trumpet you gave up after high school. Plan that trip to Australia. Say "I love you" to your sibling.

Henry David Thoreau wrote, "Make the most of your regrets.... To regret deeply is to live afresh." No matter how many years later, learn the lessons of your regrets, redirect your course or not—and open the door to a fresh start. ✱

"We often look so long and regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us."

—Alexander Graham Bell

## 10 Ways to Heal Through Creativity

*When working through issues or recovering from trauma, it's helpful to engage your heart and unconscious mind. Here are some creative pursuits for assisting the healing process.*

**1. Visual art.** Painting, sculpting, drawing...all can give shape to the images in your unconscious.

**2. Drama.** Dialogue with inner characters to discover their motives. Role-play to gain insight into the stories of your life. Create new outcomes to empower your new, emerging self.

**3. Collage.** This is especially helpful for creating the vision of who and how you want to be.

**4. Poetry.** Poet Mary Oliver says that a poem is "like a coiled spring, waiting to release its energy in a few clear phrases." Poetry can crystallize feelings that lie under the surface.

**5. Dance.** The body has a wisdom all its own; moving it according to inner impulses helps access new information.

**6. Music.** Playing an instrument, no matter how well, can be meditative, relaxing and emotionally soothing.

**7. Play.** Try imaginative play with figurines, improv games, or laughter for no reason at all. Playing can release stuck energy and open up channels for healing.

**8. Creative writing.** Write stories about your life—or journal—to uncover how you really feel and imagine new possibilities.

**9. Mask-making.** What do your inner characters look like? Mask-making can bring them to life, allowing you to interact with them.

**10. Singing.** Singing can be a balm to soothe hurts or a loud-speaker for the soul. Open up your voice and see what comes out. ✱

# Handling Adversity: You're Stronger Than You Thought

Catastrophic events like 9/11 and the aftermath of hurricane Katrina can knock us to our knees. But personal adversities can pack an equally powerful punch. Our spouse is diagnosed with cancer, our son has a mental breakdown, we lose our home. Often these events seem to come out of nowhere and feel completely unmanageable as we struggle to regain our footing and any semblance of "normal."

But, like great trees, humans can grow stronger when exposed to powerful winds. That is easy to say, we may think, as we recall those who did not grow stronger but instead broke in the wind. How do we increase our inner strength and flexibility so that we not only survive the adversity but thrive? Here are several strategies that can help.

**Take responsibility.** Look at your role in the situation. Was the event, in fact, predictable? You may have

had more control over the situation than you realized. At the same time, don't take more responsibility than is warranted. If your daughter develops a brain tumor it's not

because you did something wrong. Be honest, but don't point fingers, not even at yourself.

**Be optimistic and think creatively.** Trust that there's a solution to every problem and let your mind soar.

Approach the problem from new and different

directions. Perhaps rather than losing your home, you could find a housemate whose rent would make the difference between paying the mortgage or not.

**Have courage and speak up.**

Courage is taking action despite the fear you feel. If your doctor isn't taking you seriously, speak up. Be your own advocate. Tell him or her what you want and need. Don't assume that he or she "should know."



**Take the long view.** Remember that "this too shall pass." Recount other times when you have overcome challenges. How did you do it? Who or what helped you? Who or what can help you this time?

**Maintain a sense of humor.**

There's truth in the adage: "laughter is the best medicine." Even in the darkest of times, laughter can help ease the pain.

**Get support.** No one can handle everything alone. When you get that overwhelmed feeling—or even before—reach out. Ask for help. Next time, ask for it sooner. You'll be amazed by how much better you feel.

**Don't quit.** Persistence may be the greatest human quality that helps us overcome adversity. Draw inspiration from the great heroes of the world—Nelson Mandela, Harriet Tubman, Mahatma Gandhi—people who persisted despite the odds. Remember, you are your own best ally. And you're stronger and more resilient than you thought. ✨

**Leslie Tuchman, MFT**  
Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist  
11850 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 201  
Los Angeles, CA 90025  
310-562-6105  
www.leslietuchman.com  
2008 Speaking Engagements/Workshops  
Topic: *Writing As Healing*  
April 5 Temple Beth El, San Pedro, CA  
May 21 NAMJ, Westside LA  
June 3 Westside Council of  
Bereavement Facilitators  
Writing/Therapy Groups and Retreats:  
4th Sundays, Introductory Workshops  
1st and 3rd Sundays, ongoing groups  
(Reservations required. Please call  
310.562-6105 for details.)