

Summer 2008

THRIVING

A JOURNAL OF WELL-BEING
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The Power of Poetry For Healing

by Leslie Tuchman, MFT

Reading poems about survival, addictions, transitions, hope, abandonment, loss and ultimately strength, can quickly get to the core of how people are experiencing their personal issues.

When poetry is used for healing in group therapy it offers opportunities for insight, connection, creativity and catharsis as well as fun. Poetry for Healing is designed specifically for the non-writer. There is no writing instruction or critique. Instead the focus is on a powerful therapeutic process.

From the seeds of creation to awareness and insight

"A moment's insight is sometimes worth a life's experience" -Oliver Wendell Holmes

Prewritten poems are used as source material for writing activities and discussion. Inspired by the source poem entitled *Listen* by W.S. Merwin, group member A.E.F. states "The words of this poem hit that still tender place inside when I was invisible to family and to myself."

"By listening to other participants' stories, thoughts and perceptions, I realize that our life issues and problems are similar. We are not alone, but connected. By sharing we all grow," states group member, M.K.

From a safe circle of words to new bonds of understanding

Once people get involved in the group, amazing things emerge; taking risks, forming bonds and opening up doors that would be too scary to open anywhere else. Group member M.K. states "I give a piece of myself to everyone present. We all want to be heard, acknowledged, recognized and validated. We do that for each other."

From catharsis to calm

"Writing in our therapy group is providing a way for me to access those deep-down hidden feelings that have tripped me up and kept me bound for so very long. The process is cathartic for me and I find my creativity growing"- A.E.F., group member.

Though people may discuss troubling issues and feelings, this process is not depressing.

There is always time to work with each individual in the therapeutic process until there is a feeling of resolution. Clients leave the two-hour sessions feeling cleansed, calm, empowered and grateful to have shared and been heard and understood.

"When the door opens and it's back to reality," M.K. continues, "I try to take the experience with me and not think so much, but feel and open myself up to the richness that I had in the experience."

If you are drawn to the idea of using poetry as a therapeutic tool, a group setting might just be the perfect way to begin. Remember that it's not the product that matters; what matters is the process of discovery, growth and healing. ✨

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Leslie Tuchman is a Marriage and Family Therapist in West Los Angeles, and a recipient of the Art Lerner Poetry Therapy Award. Leslie leads therapy groups using Poetry For Healing and assists clients with a wide range of personal issues in her West LA private psychotherapy practice. She can be reached at (310) 562-6105 or at her website, www.leslietuchman.com.

The Writing Group

by Perie Longo
from her book

The Privacy of Wind, Poems

With joy we sit we cry
we confess we are sorry
we are anxious we are tongue-tied
we are heart-bound we are safe
we are falling off the cliff
of our heart into a pool
of unswum water so blue we think
we are whales we are one
we breach we cry we breathe
we burst forth like a bull
through the gate headfirst
into the cape of our lives
china splinters slivered translucent
under an eclipsed moon oh watch us
jump over mercy leap with
our capes like wings
that leave us splendid
as never before
we hover on a scarf of air
wafted in from somewhere
we have never been but plan to go
as soon as possible
yes we are speaking untying
our tongues no longer sorry
and then we come down
and go to where we came from
but something is different
we are smiling our minds
are blue and falling
and nothing hurts Amen.

Reprinted with permission by Perie Longo, poet laureate of Santa Barbara, California. Perie Longo has a PhD, is an MFT in private practice and is a Registered Poetry Therapist.

A Letter From Leslie Tuchman, MFT



I hope you enjoy this issue of Thriving and find the articles and quiz thought-provoking.

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 for adolescents, adults, children, couples and families. I have worked in educational settings, addiction treatment centers and mental health clinics for more than 20 years. (My bio is available on my website at 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.

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11850 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 201
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Phone: (310) 562-6105.



How Well Do You Handle Worry?

At its essence, worry is a useful response, helping us anticipate—and avoid—danger by taking constructive action. But too often, worry becomes an endless loop that makes it hard to sleep, focus and perform, and stresses our physical systems. Take this Thriving Quiz to find out how well you handle worry.

True False

- 1. I keep my worries to myself. I'm afraid I'll burden others if I share my concerns. The problem is, then it builds up and I get really stressed.
- 2. I write about my fears in a journal. This takes some of the power out of them. After writing, creative solutions seem to just show up.
- 3. I lie in bed for two or three hours at night worrying, just hoping to fall back asleep. I feel tired all the time.
- 4. Getting involved with my family, friends, place of worship, organizations, etc., gives me a sense of being part of something bigger than myself. When I do that, my worries seem to dissipate.
- 5. I face and take responsibility for problems and commit to a plan of action, rather than worrying about what might happen.
- 6. What really works for me when I'm feeling tense and nervous is to take a long walk, run, bike ride or work out. When I exercise more, I worry less.
- 7. When my worries spin on in an endless loop, I know it's time for a gratitude list. Focusing on the things I am grateful for is like turning my worries inside out.
- 8. My worries seem to come from nowhere, and they feel uncontrollable. When I'm in the grip of them, I feel incapable of coming up with any solutions.
- 9. I worry mostly about things that, in fact, have a very low probability of actually occurring—dying in a plane crash, going bankrupt, etc.
- 10. Rather than let my nighttime thoughts keep me from getting to sleep, I focus on physical sensations, such as the feel of the sheets and the warmth of my own body.
- 11. I try to catch my worrying as close to the beginning as possible. Then I take some time to relax, breathe deeply and get centered.
- 12. When I'm immersed in my worried thoughts, I have, but rarely notice, physical sensations such as speedy heartbeat, sweatiness and shakiness.
- 13. The more repetitive my worrying becomes, the more persuasive it seems.
- 14. I worry about others because I don't really trust that they can take care of themselves. I've noticed, however, that most of the time, they can.
- 15. When I'm concerned about something, I take action. Then I let go, trusting that I've done all I can do.

Shifting your worry to wonder opens up possibilities for curiosity and action rather than dread and immobility. Ask yourself: How will it all turn out? What can I do to make the outcome the best it can be? If you would like to work on worry, trust or any other concerns, please don't hesitate to call.

Why Therapy? Exploring the Strengths of Seeking Help

Long before there were therapists, there were family members. Grandpa and Aunt Jane listened, or gave us advice, or sometimes just told us to buck up. If family couldn't help, there were friends or a clergy member. But most likely, we were also warned not to broadcast our troubles, and many people suffered their mental problems silently.

Times change, and so has society's acceptance of seeking help. The old stigma of being seen as weak or incapable is largely gone, helped by many well-known writers, actors and politicians being open about their struggles with, and treatments for, everything from depression to chronic shoplifting. Going to a therapist is now seen as a positive step in most people's lives.

"Therapy is a unique relationship and what makes it valuable sets it apart from friendships, working partnerships, family connections and love affairs," says Carl Sherman, author of *How to Go to Therapy: Making the Most of Professional Help*.

In his book, Sherman describes therapy as a balance in which two people are "collaborating on a single project: helping you deal with your problems and achieve the change you want. There is no other agenda."

It's the simplicity of that agenda, combined with a structured schedule, confidentiality and trust, that make this unique relationship work so well for so many people. Rather than proof that someone is "sick," it is a sign of good health to make a commitment to change.

Some people still believe a therapist will make them lie on a couch. While some therapists might have couches in their offices, you choose where to sit. You choose what to say. You choose when to say it. And, nowadays, there is an incredible

number of ways to explore problems. Beyond conventional talk therapy, there is art therapy, music therapy, somatic therapy—even laughter therapy—to name just a few. For every kind of problem, and every kind of person, there is a therapeutic healing modality that fits.

The strength of therapy is that there are no strings attached. In his book, Sherman offers some further benefits of the therapeutic relationship:

1. **Safety.** If the relationship is right, you can feel safe to reveal your fears, dreams and fantasies without fear of repercussions or judgment on the part of the therapist. Unlike telling a friend or family member, your words to a therapist won't come back to haunt you.

2. **Confidentiality.** The therapist is bound by ethics and law (except in a few well-defined cases) not to reveal what you have said during sessions. This adds to the feeling of safety and trust, and aids in people making changes.

3. **Learning.** Therapy can be seen as a deeply educational experience, in which a therapist acts like a coach or teacher to help the client see the world—inner and outer—in new and positive ways.

Into each life some rain must fall, and we all have felt deluged at least once in our lives. Grief, loss, anger, financial hardship, relationship problems, stress—all of these are a normal part of life. So is seeking help when coping is just too hard. It's also normal to be a little afraid of what friends and family might say about seeing a therapist. But, in the end, it's your life, and you know best how to make it a richer, happier and more fulfilling one—with a little help. ✧



10 Ways to Simplify Your Life

These days a chorus of thousands has taken up Henry David Thoreau's advice to "Simplify, simplify." And for good reason. Few among us would deny our lives are too complicated and filled with too much stress.

Simplicity is about eliminating clutter—from your mind, your home, your relationships and your lifestyle. Following are ten ways to begin.

1. **Get a clear idea of what you want your life to look like.** This picture will help you discover what you must eliminate.
2. **Let go of unnecessary projects,** roles or self-imposed obligations that take up time and keep you away from what you really want.
3. **Say No to what you don't want** in your life. Say Yes to what you do want.
4. **Schedule "break" days** for yourself where you don't do anything but what you really want. Don't cancel them.
5. **Make a "to do" day** and get all those chores and errands done in a single day.
6. **Create space.** File away or toss.
7. **Make and return phone calls only during certain hours.**
8. **Shop only when you have to.** Question your purchases. Consuming less is good for the planet, too.
9. **Ask for and accept help.** Delegate chores. Hire work done when possible.
10. **Remember to breathe,** to ground yourself and be physically present.

A gratitude list will help you discover what really matters to you. Simplifying means making choices that will improve the quality of your life. ✧

Creativity Belongs to Each of Us

The sound may be as faint as the stirring of butterfly wings or loud as a brass band on the Fourth of July. Or you may not hear a sound at all, but feel an urging, an inner pull, a sense of excitement and longing that resonates from within. This is the call to create, and it is universal, bidding each of us to bring something new into being.

"Creativity is the Self searching for itself," said George Gamez, Ph.D., author of *How to Catch Lightning in a Bottle*. We create in order to express our unique visions and perceptions. We create to communicate and to form a bond with our fellow human beings.

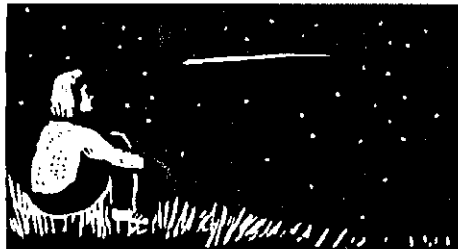
Creative expression helps us feel connected to the world and builds bridges of understanding. It nourishes us and helps us grow, provides insights and deeper understandings. Creativity is fun, exciting and playful. It relieves stress and releases tension. It provides a way of communication when normal channels may be blocked or are insufficient—when we must speak in colors and textures and shimmering visions and music.

Creativity is love expressing itself; it heals and renews. Our creations are mirrors in which others may see themselves and the signature of our lives

that says, "This is how I saw it."

Everyone is creative

No matter what you may have been told, every one of us is creative. It is as much a part of us as our voice and breath and fingerprints. Creativity isn't just about making "art."



Cooking, gardening, keeping a journal, handiwork and crafts are all creative acts. Arranging flowers or rearranging furniture, painting a picture or painting a room, singing on stage or singing in the shower—these are all responses to the call.

Creativity is a way of living. It is being spontaneous and playful, exercising the imagination, finding solutions, and embracing possibilities and doing it all with passion.

Yet for all the joy and fulfillment it brings, some resist the call to be creative.

In our culture the ideas that "time is money" and "art is frivolous" hold certain sway and old messages like "stay inside the lines" or "you can do better than that" have remarkable staying power. It takes courage to look beneath the surface of what we've been told to find our heart's desire.

Creativity requires risk-taking. It asks us to surrender, to lose control and to trust. "Committing to our creativity is an act of faith," wrote Jan Phillips, in *Marry Your Muse*. "A promise to believe in ourselves."

Honoring the creative Self means finding time, making space, being patient and taking the chance of looking foolish. You cannot care too much what others think or say. You must be willing to start over and stay with it; creativity takes stamina. There are no magical secrets or absolute rules. Creativity can't be taught. You just do it. "Creativity belongs to the artist in each of us," said Corita Kent.

Like the body's natural urge for motion and the human need for connection and community, the spirit longs to express itself. So when you hear the call to create, answer, "Yes!" It is your self searching for your Self, a movement toward being whole. ✽

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June, July, August, Sept (1st and 3rd Sundays)

Ongoing Women's Poetry for Healing Therapy Group, 3 to 5pm

August, 7 & 21, 2008

UCLA Pediatric Pain Clinic: Poetry for Healing Group Workshops

UCLA Tiverton House, Westwood, CA

Drop in Poetry For Healing Groups for NAMI Community

Saturday, July 20 2:30-4pm

Saturday, Aug 9 2:30-4pm

August 16, 17, 2008

Summer Training Institute for Poetry Therapy

The Healing Nature of Imagery, Rhythm and Sound in Poetry

Facilitated by Perie Longo, PhD, Registered Poetry Therapist

CEU's available. Call (310) 562-6105 for further information

