

Journaling to Organize Our Minds

Tracking the movement of time while we are stationary.

By Annette Januzzi Wick

During this period of isolation, we have been relegated to staying beneath our own roofs. We are cooking meals. We are in a shared space with our children or spouse, or locked in a room participating in a videoconference. Grounded in our homes, we task ourselves to declutter closets and kitchens.

But our mind is what needs cleaning the most. And as we lose the edges of our day, the best way to prepare our minds for what comes next is to journal.

The concept of journaling is not new to people who have experienced a crisis or witnessed an extraordinary event in their lives. We all fall into one of those two categories now and journaling offers the chance to create a written record of these days. There is something surprising and sacred that occurs between a hand holding a pen, and the imprint of words upon a page. The physical act of forming each letter is like sewing our thoughts and emotions together into a quilt for when we need cover.

Journaling also offers many insights into our thinking. The famed author, Studs Terkel, produced a body of writing called *Working*. After recording an interview with a young woman, he played it back

for her. She cried out, “I never knew what I thought until I heard my own voice.”

The same is true when we log the journey of our day. If, as Freud stated, the *id* is “the dark, inaccessible part of our personality...filled with energy reaching it from the instincts,” our *ego* helps propel our instincts forward by revealing ourselves on the page.



Journaling can be as simple as a list or as complex as continuing a story, entry to entry. Either way, we can track the movement of time, and the ups and downs of our day—which feels self-indulgent at a time when anything indulgent feels wrong.

But consider this: Two years prior to Great Britain entering World War II, the country had begun an undertaking called [Mass-Observation](#) to encourage ordinary citizens to become *civilian diarists* by documenting whatever happened around them and yes — whatever happened inside their heads, for sociologists to study later.

If you have attended a Lloyd Library writing workshop, participants attempt to do the same. Writers become civilian diarists, reacting to the civilian diarists who came before them—a botanist, a person of letters, the apothecary—and strive to give new meaning to old works.

Our descendants will want to know why observing the lilacs was important to one writer whose eighty-year-old aunt was diagnosed with cancer. Once, when the two had climbed the steps of Cincinnati's Mt. Adams, the aunt stole a lilac off a nearby bush. Now, the writer returns each day to note when the lilac blooms. The aunt's chemotherapy appointments will end when the petals have fallen away from the heart-shaped leaves.

The rise of video happy hours, the plummeting of the stock market, the innovation of splitting one ventilator into nine, will be recorded as significant in this era. But the peculiarities of our lives, written in black and white, will prove more meaningful to those who come after, when they ask how we maintained our humanity, isolated as we were from human touch.

Looking for ideas to start journaling? [Click here](#) and scroll to the end of the post.

Annette Januzzi Wick is a writer, speaker and teacher. She is the author of ***I'll Have Some of Yours: What my mother taught me about dementia, cookies, music, the outside, and her life inside a care home***. She lives in Over-the-Rhine and is a prolific city walker. *"I believe creating links, rooting people to place, through words and work, will bring us closer to the core of humanity."* Visit www.annettejwick.com to learn more.