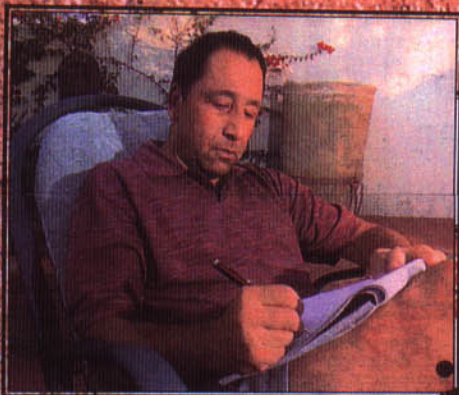


Living

TUCSON CITIZEN



WEDDINGS Is your elegant brother or worse than those "Wedding Crashers"?



Dave Caplan says journaling has helped him focus on what's going on now.

Photo by SA. CARR/TUCSON CITIZEN

I'm all write

Writers recommend journaling as a way to find your true self

By SANDRA VALDEZ GONZALEZ
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It was Henry David Thoreau who said: "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them."

"I meet so many people in my workshops who are feeling just that — despair," said Sandy Grason, a journal-writing expert and author. "Their lives are not fulfilling. Somewhere along the way, they went off track. Maybe it was in an attempt to please a parent or to earn a living, but their lives have become an endless treadmill of going through the motions, doing whatever it takes to make it to the next day, only to wake up and do it all over again."

How do people break out of the mold, get off the treadmill and live the life they once imagined?

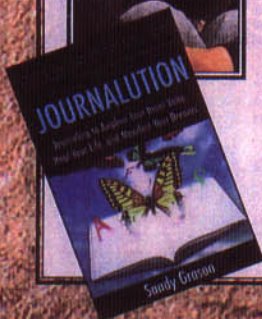
"Try journaling. Your journal is a great place to start," said Grason, who decided four years ago that she wanted to start a journaling revolution, or as she puts it, a "journalation."

In her new book called "Journalation: Journaling to Awaken Your Inner Voice, Heal Your Life and Awaken Your Dreams" (New World Library), Grason invites people to get started.

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Sandy Grason



JOURNALING TIPS

Be flexible. Keep one journal or a few in separate journals for daily writing vs. dreams. Make time to write. Journaling is a lot like exercising. It's an act of self-love that is hard to start, but has many rewards. Hearing the voice of intuition requires stillness. Give yourself time to just "be."

Write when you get the urge, early in the morning, late at night or keep a pocket journal for spare times during the day.

Start with 10 minutes of writing. Don't edit, self-censor or fear that someone will read it. Just write.

Begin where you are. Don't feel like you must start at the beginning of your life and go in chronological order. Write, doodle or do whatever comes out naturally.

Negative thoughts and feelings are OK. Just tell yourself, "Thank you for showing," and move on.

Enjoy it. Allow yourself to be a channel for your inner self.

Journaling prompts
I remember... (Write about something you remember.)

You... only younger (Do you remember yourself at age 7? Write about it.)

I don't want to write about...

Have a conversation with your 90-year-old self.

Take stock of what's wrong and what's right in your life.

Describe your "perfect" day.

Write a letter to someone who has died or hurt you, etc.

Write about five learning points in your life (and the lessons learned).

Source: "Journalation: Journaling to Awaken Your Inner Voice, Heal Your Life and Awaken Your Dreams"

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Author believes journaling can transform lives

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"When you are willing to examine the details of your life, you can change them . . . you can look a little more closely at your dreams and wishes and consider what would add vitality to your life," Grason said.

Grason, 38, started journaling at age 21 on the advice of a therapist. Initially it was a way to deal with the emotional childhood pain she carried from her parent's divorce and feelings of abandonment by her father.

"I was a lost girl searching for answers to life's biggest questions and feeling completely out of touch with my intuition - searching for a spark, a reason to get up in the morning," said Grason, who poured out her heart and soul into the pages of many stacks of journals for more than 15 years. "I found my true self on the blank page," she said, and her journals became a place to express her feelings and her secret goals and dreams.

Like so many others, Grason believes that journaling is a powerful tool we can use to transform our lives.

It is a safe place to get to know ourselves and bring us closer to who we want to be, a window into what's important to us, a supportive companion and a place to dump our emo-

tions. It's also a way to clean out the junk in our heads, an act of self love and a way to bring clarity in a confusing world, she said.

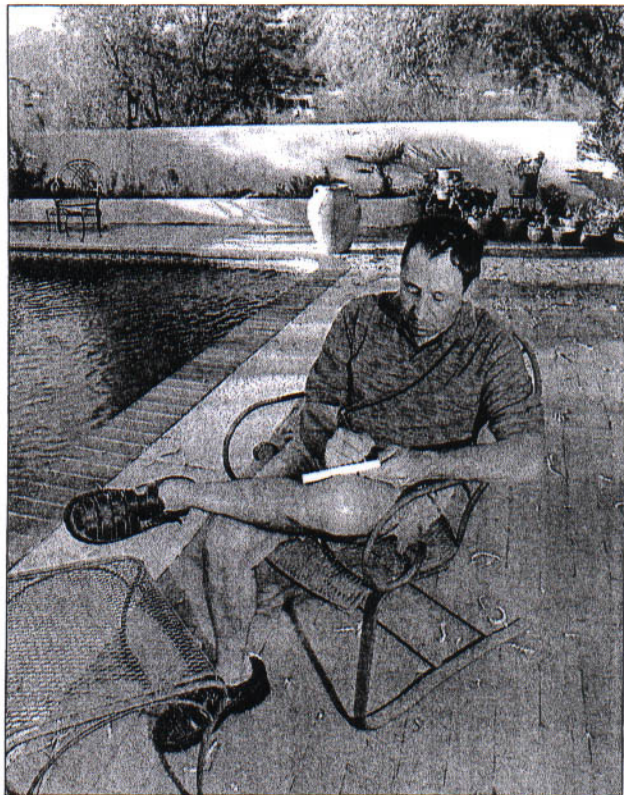
In fact, Marge Pellegrino, a local author who has led journal writing through The Learning Curve and The Writer's Project, said the Journal of American Medical Association has reported it also has health benefits.

Studies show that students go less often to the health center if they are journaling about the junk going on in their lives, and people with physiological problems found their threshold for pain to be higher because they were journaling, she said.

"So if you take the junk in your life, the emotional pain and write it down" she said, we are able to carry it differently. "You are able to reframe it, to understand it in new ways. You become a witness, rather than a judge."

Dave Caplan, 59, a retired financial trader living in Tucson and a newcomer to journaling, said Grason's book has given him a different perspective on life.

"Journaling has really helped me focus on what's going on right now instead of worrying about what's going to happen in the future or what's happened in the past. If you are con-



VAL CANEZ/Tucson Citizen

Caplan, a newcomer to journaling, enjoys writing in his back yard.

cerned about the past or the future you can write that down and sort of get rid of it."

It helped Heide Hargreaves "to awaken the inner voice in me by putting all my thoughts, experiences, dreams, visions, goals, past hurts, inner truths, feelings and emotions all into one flow, mainstreaming, to the right path toward my healing. It was like taking my heart and soul out, then examining my experiences to see myself," said Hargreaves, who admits she

carries the book and her journal everywhere she goes.

Grason said sometimes just by quieting our minds and saying, "What is my next step?", your answer is there, and it will come.

"I was searching for so many years. I thought my answers were going to be in the next guru or workshop," but no more, she said. "I don't think you'll find your answers in another book. You'll find your answers on the blank page."