

LIFE

Dear diary

As 'journaling' becomes increasingly popular, advocates say committing your inner life to paper can help you clear your head and focus on your future

By Cheryl Binning

JOURNAL writing has taken on a sheen of glamour these days as celebrities reveal their passion for their diaries.

Actress Nicole Kidman, for example, recently told *InStyle* magazine that she keeps a journal, and believes that "writing is a therapy."

R&B star Alicia Keys says she has kept a journal since she was nine.

"I still spend part of every morning writing about my feelings or what I want to accomplish — many of [my] poems and lyrics are from my journals," Keys told *Self* magazine in February.

Oprah Winfrey is another big advocate of journaling. "Keeping a journal will absolutely change your life in ways you've never imagined," Oprah tells her fans on her website, *oprah.com*, which includes a section where people can submit and share their journal entries.

And then there's Renée Zellweger, who brought the bumbling and ever-obsessive journaler Bridget Jones to life on the big screen. Zellweger says she not only keeps a journal but also has a "things I'm grateful for" book to boot.

The self-help industry has also taken on the cause, advocating that writing down our experiences helps us express buried emotions, sort out feelings, make plans and set goals.

Bookstore shelves are filled with how-to books for those who need some help on the path to become a journal writer, and for the computer-savvy types, there are



Zellweger made journaling cute in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, top; Nicole Kidman as famous diarist Virginia Woolf, left.

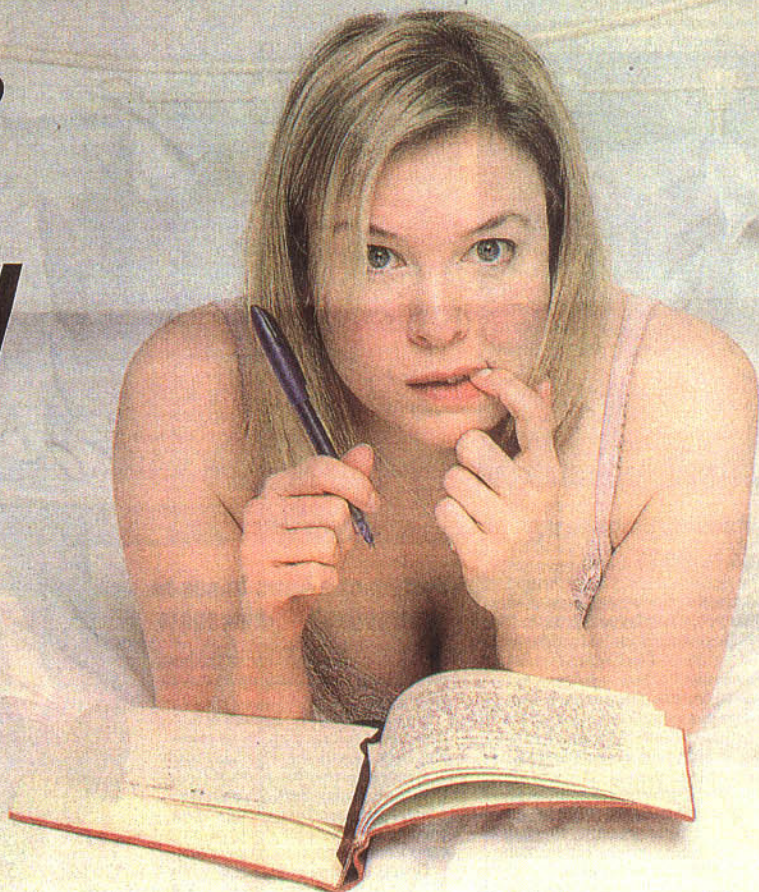
at least a dozen websites offering specialized software for journalers, such as *lifejournal.com*.

A quick scan of the Chapters-Indigo website and you'll find a how-to book for wannabe journalers of every age and religious group — and whatever neurosis they may happen to suffer from.

There's *Journaling to Recovery*, *Journaling for Self-Discovery*, *Journaling for Joy* and *Journaling a Pathway through Grief*. Depending on your beliefs, you can pick up the *Jewish Journaling Book* or the Christian-based *Journaling with Moses and Job*.

And there are specific journaling guides that take kids through the years — from *Baby's First Journal*, *A Guide to Journaling Summer Camp Experiences for Kids 8 to 15*, to the *Creative Journal for Teens*.

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Guide to group writing

How to hold a journaling group

1. First, agree to keep all information strictly confidential.
2. Do not give unsolicited advice or criticize anyone.
3. Choose a different facilitator each meeting, to gather any supplies and plan an opening topic. They will also be in charge of setting the timer and keeping the meeting flowing.
4. Journaling exercises should be timed, approximately five to 10 minutes per exercise, and amount of time allotted for sharing should be kept to one to three minutes per member per topic.
5. Begin by asking a member to draw a topic (see suggestions below) and read it aloud. Facilitator sets the timer and everyone writes for the agreed amount of time.
6. Possible topics include:
 - I am afraid of...
 - If only...
 - Things I love (beach, sunset, chocolate, smell of coffee brewing, bookstores, e.g.)
 - Write about something you really loved as a child;
 - Who am I?
 - Write your perfect day, morning to night, as if you were already living the life of your dreams. Be very specific!
7. Group members can also write their own prompts on a slip of paper, then fold and toss it into a bowl or hat. Encourage members to collect new prompts to share with the group. Prompts can be anything, lines from books and poems, billboards, magazine ads or a phrase overheard on a bus.
8. Do one to three timed writings.
9. Read journal entries round-robin style.
10. Close the meeting by asking if anyone has any other special journal entries or quotes or poems they'd like to share.

Source: www.journalation.com

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Diary

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And if for some reason you find the idea of keeping a diary too complex and befuddling, you can always resort to the *Complete Idiot's Guide to Journaling*.

One of the newest diary guide books to enter the saturated marketplace is *Journalution* by Florida-based author Sandy Grason.

"Journaling is becoming more and more popular," says Grason, who has spent the last five years travelling across North America leading seminars and workshops on topics such as keeping a journal for emotional healing, for self-expression, to manifest your dreams, and how to write your memoir.

"Oprah has done several shows on journaling, it's being discussed in many magazines and every time I turn around, a successful person is saying how they have been writing a journal for years and how important it is to write down what you want to create in your life."

Grason took up pen and paper herself over 15 years ago, at the age of 21, to help deal with the loss she felt over her father leaving her family when she was a young child.

"There was a lot of anger in my first journals but I noticed immediately when I started writing I felt calmer, less reactive to things around me that usually set me off."

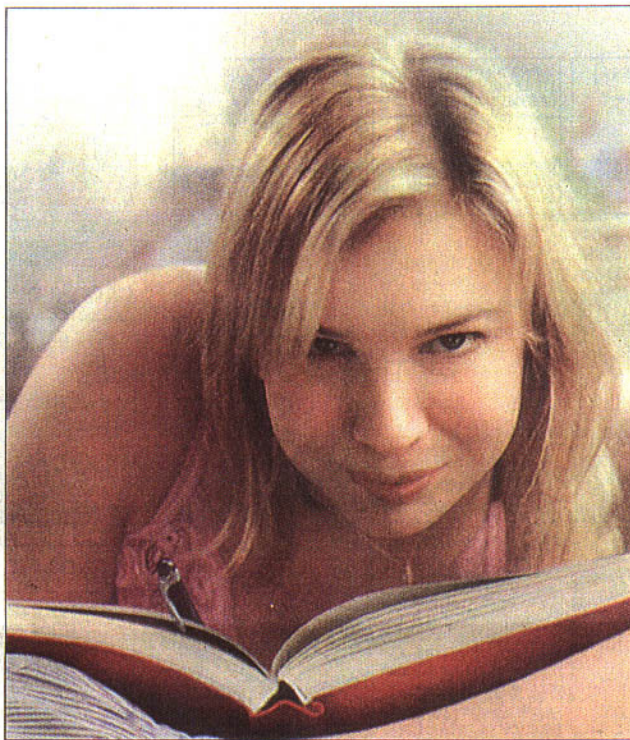
So what does her book add to the crowded diary-as-therapy marketplace?

For one, Grason says she throws out all notion of rules when it comes to keeping a diary.

"My philosophy is there is no right way to journal, nor is there a wrong way," she says.

Grason doesn't care what you write on, where you do it, or what colour of pen you use, so long as it feels right to you.

Some journaling guides advise readers to write in the morning when the mind is fresh, others advocate writing at night to capture what happened that day. But Grason says you should write



Using a journal to write down her dreams worked for Bridget Jones.

whenever it feels right to you, even if that means scribbling on scrap paper while you are waiting in the dentist's office.

And don't worry, she says, if you only write once a week or just once a month.

"I was one of those people who would read a book that said, 'Write every day for 30 days and your life will be transformed,' so I would go out buy a journal, write in it for a couple weeks, then forget about it," she says.

"Then I would see a beautiful journal in a store and say, 'This will be the one I write in every day,' and soon I had a shelf full of half-full journals. I used to look at that as a failure and beat

myself up over not sticking to it. I want to take that guilt away and let people journal in their own way. I don't think you have to write every day to receive the benefits."

Another novel idea Grason advocates is group journaling.

While writing in a diary is usually considered a solitary and private act, Grason suggests that people meet with their friends to write together and share their entries.

It's kind of like a book club or writing club, except at this meeting, people get together for an hour of soul-searching in their journals.

And the idea is catching on. In her book, Grason offers tips on

how to start a journaling group, and at her website, www.journalution.com, she connects people in cities across North America with other avid journalers to form meeting groups.

Since *Journalution* was published in May, more than 35 *Journalution* groups have been formed in the United States, from Arizona to Vermont (there are now a couple of clubs in Canada, but none in Winnipeg yet).

"The energy of journaling is magnified when a group of people write together," says Grason.

"To me, journaling is about creating something amazing and positive and the group helps you do that. They encourage each other and buoy each other up. When people get together and talk about how they feel and what they want to do with their lives, there is a real magic there."

In her book and on her website, Grason offers up prompts — diary topics, aimed at helping you cleanse your past, become clear on who you are and what you want for your future.

"Your journal is a safe place to get to know yourself and discover who you are," she says.

"A journal allows us to paint a picture of what we want our lives to be and help us love ourselves enough to create it."

Grason says that journaling is more important than ever because of our fast-paced lifestyles and the many signals we receive from mass media.

"We are bombarded with messages every day — how we should live our lives, who we should be, what we should do," she explains.

"And when you write, you dump all that clutter and confusion going on in your head. It's like taking a big exhale. And that allows you to hear your inner wisdom that is otherwise muffled because of all the other stuff floating around in your head.

"That's what *Journalution* is all about — it is the inspiration that comes when you release your doubts and fears onto the blank pages of your journal and your inner wisdom comes shining through."

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