

Writing therapy can help create a brighter future

By Perry Garfinkel, Los Angeles Times

British author Graham Greene, in his 1980 book, "Ways of Escape," put into words what most writers know: "Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, melancholia, the panic and fear which is inherent in a human situation."

Academicians trace the idea of writing as therapy to the time of Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II, about 1,200 BC. The entrance to his royal library declared: "House of Healing for the Soul." American Unitarian minister Samuel Crothers coined the term "bibliotherapy" in 1916. In the late 1980s, James Pennebaker, psychology professor at the University of Texas at Austin, led the modern writing therapy movement in a landmark research study that showed the potential health benefits of "expressive writing" about emotional upheaval.

In the last two decades, writing therapy has joined dance and art therapy as a legitimate therapeutic tool. And that has triggered growing interest in a type of writing that focuses on the healing power of putting feelings down on paper or screen – as evidenced by the burgeoning popularity of the memoir, as well as the use of journaling in businesses and American schools.

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