

“Write For Life”

PRESS KIT

Contact Information:

Dr. Sheppard B. Kominars

415-863-0901

write-for-life@pacbell.net

www.writeforlifeccp.com

NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

Rx for Health & Fun At Any Age!

Dr. Sheppard B. Kominars, author of “Write For Life: Healing Body, Mind, and Spirit Through Journal Writing,” will present workshops in Northern Virginia, at George Mason University’s “Fall For the Book” on September 24, and at additional book signings in D.C., Philadelphia, and Cleveland, September 24 through October 12.

“Why, oh why didn’t someone walk up to me when I was 25 and hand me a book like this?”
Frank McCourt

Complaining and dumping problems and worries in a journal can make you healthier without spending a penny! More than 15 years of research on the effects of journal writing reveals that people struggling with chronic pain or recovering from health or emotional crises experience significant benefits by writing instead of just talking about their problems or stuffing them. “Whine and complain all you need to,” says Dr. Sheppard Kominars in his third book on recovery, “Write For Life: Healing Body, Mind, and Spirit Through Journal Writing” that appears in July, published by the Cleveland Clinic Press as part of its mission to extend health literacy in the world.

With a lively introduction by Frank McCourt (“Angela’s Ashes”), Dr. Kominars’ book presents fifteen different journeys into healing that include Dreams, Legacy Letters, Last Rights, Zen, along with scientific research and entries from both famous and infamous journal writers.

“For twenty-seven years I have been the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of California. I know how to be that. What I don’t know is how not to be that. Retirement awaits. And I look forward to using Dr. Sheppard Kominars’ book, *Write for Life*, to be a guide for my new life. Not only to transition but to make sense of the change. I intend to write for my life.

The Rt. Rev. William E. Swing
Episcopal Bishop of California

“I found this book inspiring. Written in a personal style, it gives accessible lessons in journal writing and in life. My own journaling has been enriched, and I have a generous list of new things to try as time goes on. Every chapter is interesting and provocative.”

Corey Weinstein, M.D., C..C. H.

ISBN: 1596240776

Price: \$14.95; Trade Paperback, 291 pages

AVAILABLE: Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Book Website: www.writeforlifeccp.com

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Frank McCourt's Introduction calls it "warm and wonderful." This book creates a personal wellness center for healing body, mind and spirit through journal writing and makes the process easy for everyone. Reluctant writers as well as long term journal writers explore fifteen journeys through such areas as: Self-Caring; American Indian Spirituality; Legacy Letters; Travel. Bringing the facts discovered by research on the healing benefits of writing into the daily perspective of self-discovery, this self-paced book offers a life-long adventure into living healthier and having more fun doing it.

With fifty years of journal writing experience, and the expertise from workshops all over the United State, the author presents a coherent long-term program for the body, the mind, and the spirit. This journal writing program helps develop inner strength and support for every kind of experience. The book offers important insight into participating more completely in life before, during and after retirement. With its focus on healing, the book is inspirational as well as practical; it sets the stage for living BETTER. Unlike other journal writing books, this one is not about making art or story-telling; it is about healing whatever needs to be made whole in everyone who reads it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Sheppard B.Kominars has written two previous books on recovery (Harper, 1989, and Hazelden, 1996) and is himself a cancer survivor who has worked over the past twenty-five years in counseling and consulting. His workshops at UCSF, Stanford Complementary Care Center, Kaiser Permanente, Center Center of the Desert, and other senior residences and centers have inspired participants. He began teaching writing in 1956 at Washington College and has a long career in higher education and consulting in health and education. He is a cancer survivor and has been writing journals for over fifty years. He was born in Philadelphia, PA, and has lived in San Francisco, CA, since 1986. He is a graduate of Kenyon College, Columbia University, and Boston University.

INTENDED MARKETS

Consumer health care, health and wellness, health professionals, senior center administrators and staff, recovery centers, retirement centers, cancer centers, arthritis and chronic pain, gerontology centers.

SALES AND MARKETING POINTS

[What makes "Write For Life: the Survivor's Way" unique:

1. It is not therapy centered. 2. It is based on solid research. 3. It is accessible to everyone, including reluctant writers. 4. It includes the entire spectrum of experience – the joy and the anguish. 5. It has been tested with many different kinds of participants of all ages and in all stages of wellness. 6. It is a long-term, integrated program for recovery. 7. It helps people feel good about themselves and their lives. 8. The program can be done on an individual basis or in groups. 9. The benefits of it are obvious to those who make it a priority in their lives. 10. Like the "South Beach Diet," it works over time to provide results. 11. It requires no expensive outlay of funds. 12. It offers excitement and stimulation to everyone looking for a new way to enjoy life.]

**WRITE FOR LIFE
OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION: Frank McCourt

OVERVIEW & USER'S GUIDE: The Big Question: Why Write a Journal?
Making the case for writing (health crisis, 1955). Linking healing with self-expression. Finding answers.

PART ONE: INITIATING THE HEALING PROCESS

There is no “right way” or “wrong way” to write in a journal. This means discovering what works for you to improve the quality of your life.

CHAPTER ONE: Square One

Focus on healing: (1) Being a survivor. (2) Other journal writers and their obstacles. (3) Scientific research on the health effects of journal writing. (4) The mystery of healing. (5) Personal expectations.

CHAPTER TWO: Getting Started

The basics: Choosing paper, pen, where to write, when to write, what and how much to write. *You* are the audience. How do you support your efforts?

CHAPTER THREE: Staying Started

The power of inertia. Also: Framing the obstacles. Writing about feelings. Dealing with confidentiality.

PART TWO: FIVE WINDOWS ON HEALING

The following chapters shed light on important areas for exploration. You are encouraged to open any of these windows during the writing process to explore new insights and encouragement.

CHAPTER FOUR: Survivors and Surviving.

Life after cancer diagnosis. Guilt and denial. Valuing life; changing old rules. Emily Gibbs' discovery in “Our Town.” Invocation.

CHAPTER FIVE: Journal Excerpts.

By Anna Dostoevsky; Marjorie Fleming; Anne Frank; Alice James; Katherine Mansfield; Frank McCourt; Randy Shilts; Virginia Woolf; and many more.

CHAPTER SIX: Scientific Research and Writing Techniques.

Research by James Pennebaker. *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron and other books.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Healing the Survivor.

New and old ideas about healing. Homeopathy. Hopelessness. Paying attention. Healing and wholeness.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Expectations.

Creating time. Dealing with writer's blocks. Managing change. Returning to journal writing after a long interval. Dealing with aging. Having fun.

PART THREE: EXPLORING NEW DIRECTIONS INTO HEALING

In these fifteen adventures, you will discover ways to heal yourself as you write. Some will be familiar; others you may be encountering for the first time. Choose one (or as many as you like) that appeals to you.

CHAPTER NINE: Self-Caring

Getting Started: Crises and fallout. Personal values.

Staying Started: Creating a body, mind, spirit inventory.

New Directions: Assessment of "unfinished business." Setting priorities.

CHAPTER TEN: Food and Nourishment.

Getting Started: Our own "movable feast." The politics of food.

Staying Started: Obstacles and limitations. Food and identity.

New Directions: Exotic foods and metaphors. Spiritual dimensions.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: Travel.

Getting Started: New impressions. Literary heroes and romance. Childhood journeys.

Staying Started: Traveling companions. Destinations. Savoring expectations.

New Directions: Journey's end.

CHAPTER TWELVE: Legacy Letters, Part One (Laying the Foundation).

Getting Started: Taking your pulse. How you wish to be remembered.

Staying Started: Creating a framework. Surveying past and present values.

New Directions: Framing questions about your family of origin. Finding answers.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: Dreams.

Getting Started: Significance of dreams. Dream recording technique.

Staying Started: Encouraging the dream. Revelations, connections, and resistance.

New Directions: Nocturnal consciousness. Dreamwork ideas. Sharing dreams.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: "Now and Zen."

Getting Started: Physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Wholeness vs. incompleteness.

Staying Started: "Everyday mind" in focus.

New Directions: Living as-if. Mindfulness.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: Confronting "Not Yets."

Getting Started: Immortality and denial. Wish-lists. Filling in the blanks.

Staying Started: Fantasy and fun. Identifying priorities. Assessing risk.

New Directions: Initiating the planning process. Accepting limitations.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: Legacy Letters, Part Two (Creating the Letters).

Getting Started: Identifying recipients and content.

Staying Started: Setting the stage.

New Directions: Drafting letters. Practical details.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: American Indian Spirituality.

Getting Started: Interconnectedness. Good medicine. Reconsidering old answers.

Staying Started: The Uniworld. Medicine walk through nature.

New Directions: Shifting perspectives. Sacred spaces. The Great Spirit Prayer.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: Creativity.

Getting Started: Allowing energy to flow. Fun with color.

Staying Started: Not-knowing vs. knowing. Needs and obstacles inventory.

New Directions: Extending limits. The bogeyman (perfectionism). Getting unstuck.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: Work and play.

Getting Started: Defining terms. Valuing accomplishments. Expectations.

Staying Started: Choices made; choices declined.

New Directions: Childhood and adult games. Retirement considerations. Importance of fun in healing

CHAPTER TWENTY: Meditation and prayer.

Getting Started: Focusing on needs of the spirit. Meditation practices.

Staying Started: Spiritual calisthenics. A visual approach.

New Directions: Encountering obstacles. Inspirational guides.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: The experience of joy.

Getting Started: What is happiness?

Staying Started: Relationships. Significance of the past.

New Directions: The changing search for happiness.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: “Last Rights” (Embracing Life and Death).

Getting Started: “Surrender to Win.” Writing about death.

Staying Started: Surprising questions. Balancing the scales.

New Directions: Health-care directives. Telling your own and others’ stories.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: Pilgrimage.

Getting Started: Journey milestones.

Staying Started: Facts and feelings. Five crucial events of your life.

New Directions: Lightening the load. Today’s wishes.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: Lifelong Journaling.

How to use what you’ve learned so far in your ongoing healing process .

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Published Reviews

San Mateo County Times 8/13/07 p. 12

By Joan Aragone

Correspondent

JOURNAL-WRITING CLASS NOW IN BOOK FORM

“Write for Life,” the popular journal-writing class that drew Peninsula residents to weekly sessions at Stanford, Kaiser Hospitals, the San Mateo Senior Center and other settings around the state, will soon be available in book form, titled, appropriately, “Write for Life: Healing Body, Mind, and Spirit Through Journal Writing” (Cleveland Clinic, 2007).

The book is the outcome of more than 50 years of journal writing by Sheppard B. Kominars, 75, San Francisco-based former counselor and professor of literature, who began teaching the process following his own diagnosis and treatment for cancer in 2000.

While in a support group for cancer patients, he recognized the importance of his daily practice in helping him heal and wanted to share the experience. The result was his first journal writing class, at UC-San Francisco Medical Center in 2001. Others followed. His class in San Mateo was featured in this paper’s “Senior Journal” in 2004.

“Patients need a place to put their worries and fears,” he said in a recent personal interview. “Journals can help them manage the situation and get connected to their problems.”

Now, after seven years of workshops for thousands of people from around the United States, including Elderhostel travelers and his peers at his college 50th reunion in Ohio, he has compiled his ideas, stories of students, academic research on the effects of journal writing and examples of journal writers from history into one volume, laid out in a way that guides the reader to start the process and stay with it.

“I receive e-mails and letters all the time,” he said. “I knew I couldn’t talk to everybody but I could write a book.”

For Kominars journals are more than a place to unload your misery. They’re a place to work out conflicts, trace your emotional growth or lack of it or file experiences and feelings until you’re ready to view them with some detachment. They’re a tool.

One of his tips is to avoid re-reading your entry for several weeks. “Then you can see where you are and if you have changed. You become aware of your issues. This is a way to get connected to our own problems.”

Whining is fine, just be conscious of whether it’s getting you anywhere. “This is the place to let it all hang out, and if you need to repeat and repeat the same old whining, then do so. But if you notice that you are doing nothing but repeating, you may find it’s time to move on. This is a book about getting on with your life. Often you don’t know you are stuck,” he said. “It’s a book about healing.”

***Write for Life* by Dr. Sheppard B. Kominars**

The author of two previous books on self-help, Kominars has included in “Write for Life,” information on research by psychologist James Pennebaker in the 1980s that illustrated the effects of journal writing. In an experiment, Pennebaker separated trauma patients into three groups: One did nothing regarding journals; a second wrote about what happened, and a third wrote what happened and how they felt about it. An evaluation six months later showed that those in the third group, who acknowledged their feelings, showed the most change.

“Write for Life” is a conversational, clearly written and personal book that guides the reader on a journal-writing path, whether one is starting or well-versed in the process, comfortable with the idea of writing or paralyzed at the thought. With an introduction by Frank McCourt, author of “Angela’s Ashes,” it includes excerpts from Kominars’ journal as well as his students’ and famous writers’ and discusses the connection with journal writing and dreams, travel, food, creativity, work and prayer, and other topics. It’s a handbook for a lifetime of journal writing, as ages and circumstances change.

For information on the book or Kominars’ approach to journal writing, see the informative website www.writeforlifeccp.com. The Frequently Asked Questions section answers specifics about the process, from writing with pen versus computer to how much time or space to spend. For further information, call 415-863-0901. To order the book check www.Amazon.com. Or call Ingram Publisher Services, 800-838-1149. The book will be officially launched Aug. 22.

tagline

Like the course, the book *Write for Life* is structured to help the writer “get started and stay started,” with activities, examples of journals by famous journal keepers, anecdotes about other beginning journal writers, but unlike the course, which may last a few weeks, the book can accompany one through a lifetime.

Answers to Some Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Can I do my writing on a computer?

A: When it is not possible to write by hand, such as with certain disabilities from arthritis or the trauma caused by accident, etc., any way that facilitates writing about what is happening with you will enhance your healing process.

Q: Is it better to write my journal by hand?

A: Yes, because it strengthens the body - mind- spirit connection. Using the muscles on the body to help you connect with what is going on in your life extends the health benefits you can experience. Just as physical exercise is important for your emotions and your spiritual life, so writing by hand makes it possible for you to connect with healing on more than one level.

Q: Will you critique my journal?

A: There is enough criticism in your life already. The journal is a place to heal and therefore you are the focus of your entries. You are writing only for yourself and not to please anyone else. Getting free of the limitations that others might set for you is one of the most important features of writing in your journal.

Q: How do I know if I'm doing it right?

A: There is no right way or wrong way to write in your journal. However you write about anything – that's how you write. What is MOST important is that you include your feelings in whatever you are writing. Writing about your feelings always enhances the effect.

Q: Do I have to write every day?

A: Writing every day builds up the routine of the healing process and makes it easier to accomplish. Skipping days, or weeks, invites inertia and all the dead weight attached to it.

Q: Is there a minimum length to a journal entry?

A: There are some journal writing practices that require a minimum of three pages with every sitting. For some, this is a daunting requirement resulting in fewer and fewer entries over time. What is most important when you sit down to write is that you allow yourself to write through the first five or so minutes of “noise” – all of the things on your to-do lists, including your telephone calls. When you give yourself permission to write every day you discover that within a period of 20 to 30 minutes you are refreshed and can go on without some of the baggage you've been struggling under. Writing makes some space in your day's perspective that you come to appreciate and anticipate.

Q: What's the difference between blogging and journaling?

A: When you write in your journal, you are writing to heal yourself instead of for an audience. Blogging is publishing whatever you are writing about and expecting someone else to respond with his or her opinion of what you've written. This is quite different from healing.

Q: I hate my handwriting; what can I do about this?

A: This is only another way of being self-critical. There is enough of that already in your life

and writing in your journal is one of the best ways of moving into the realm of self-caring. Whatever your handwriting looks like, you will also discover that over time there will be many different kinds of handwriting that appear. All of them belong to you, and all of them are healing you.

Q: What will happen with my journal after I'm gone?

A: Many people have asked me this question in the workshops. I encourage them to leave instructions for the person who is responsible for looking after your affairs at that time. Be explicit: this is your decision and you can do whatever you choose.

Q: How do I get started if I haven't written in my journal for several days? Weeks? Years?

A: "Write For Life" has some important information about this in the opening chapters of the book, and you can turn to them at any time in your process to support your efforts. Just connect with your wish to live better, and you find yourself already started again on your journal.

Q: What if I want to write in my journal several times a day?

A: Just as there are no prescribed pages to write, so there is no limit to the number of times you decide to open your journal to write in it. Over time, the journal becomes your close friend, and the need to make this connection may arise from any number of circumstances. It is always there waiting for you. What is important to remember is not to let journal writing take the place of living. By expressing your feelings about what is happening in your life, you connect with the richness and depth of your experience and can savor it in new ways.

Q: Can I read anything I've written to someone else? Friend, therapist, etc.

A: You are in charge of your journal, and whatever you wish to tell someone about what you are writing is entirely your decision. But you are writing for yourself, for your own healing, and it is possible that someone else's response to what you've written might result in some form of criticism or debate. Write for several days in your journal about your reasons for revealing what you have written before you do it. You are, in a way, "publishing" your healing process. Being clear about the healing benefits of this publication is crucial to your decision.

Q: Can I use any of the material I write in my journal for a story or an autobiography?

A: The journal is yours to do whatever you choose. Many people have taken excerpts from it to develop short stories or memoirs. The journal is a rich treasury of experience, and the material in it is easily developed into many different creative projects. Allow yourself the opportunity to look on it as a source for inspiration and creativity, while still preserving its value as a place for you to heal body, mind and spirit.

Q: When is the best time to write?

A: This depends entirely upon you and the way you plan your day. It usually takes some experimenting to discover when you can show up for your journal. It is waiting there, twenty-four hours a day; you can reach for it at any time. I've written at every time of the day or night and can say that some of the times I did it were better for me than others. My usual time now for writing is at night, just before I go to sleep. When I lived beside the ocean, I wrote every morning. Find the best time for you, and make it part of your daily routine.

Q: Where is the best place to write?

A: I have written in every imaginable location under the sun. Trains, planes, buses, lobbies,

doctor's offices, classrooms, beaches, antique shows – the list goes on and on. I've written when I've been terribly uncomfortable because I just needed to write; but I find most important is to be in a place that I feel safe and easy in myself – even in the midst of turmoil. Discover this for yourself as you journal.

Q: Why is it important to insure confidentiality?

A: You deprive yourself of the healing benefits of journal writing if you are writing and know that someone else will read it. It is not possible to be honest with yourself under those circumstances. You are then writing for an audience, and that means you are writing with a built-in censor. Healing occurs when you are willing to be as honest with yourself as you can possibly be.

Q: What if I change my mind about something I've already written? Should I tear it out?

A: Give yourself permission to allow everything you've written in your journal to remain there. Changing your mind is part of the growth process, and being able to see this in yourself is a very important dimension of the healing that occurs through writing. When you are honest about what you write, you can change your mind about it tomorrow, or next year, or next decade. What you write today is a snapshot of today. It will provide you with an amazing account of yourself over time.

Q: Do I have to embark on the journeys in the order in which they are arranged in the book?

A: The book is not written with a linear concept but with the reader's need for self exploration and discovery in mind. Getting Started and Staying Started are the kick-off for the process. And the chapter on Self-Caring is useful to initiate the rest of the journeys. Find your own way on the journey that you are living, and let the book support your effort to get, and give, as much as possible in life.

Q: How can I get the most help for healing from writing in my journal?

A: By being as honest as you can each day in the routine you set up for writing in your journal. The more you exercise your wish to show up in body, mind and spirit, the more help you will offer yourself along the way.

Q: Is it useful to form a journal writing group?

A: Somehow it seems easier to write every day when you have a group of people who you know are also writing. What is most important, however, is that the group meets to discuss the process of journal writing and not the material in the journals. Some things work better than others to facilitate the process, and it is valuable to explore this. With the focus on healing, it can be useful to discuss how you went about including certain material in the entry, but the moment the discussion turns into one-upman-ship, the healing values are gone. Discussing different ideas which come up during journal writing is another way to extend the idea of healing within the group.

Q: How can I get around my intense reluctance to write about my feelings?

A: This, for many, takes practice. When you are not used to doing something, some special effort, encouragement, is needed. Many people find it difficult to acknowledge that they even have feelings, and it is only when they are faced with the task of writing about them do they give

them a name. There is a suggestion in the book about writing affirmations that will prove useful in doing this. Affirm yourself for writing about your feelings and you will find your way into this.

Q: Why is it a good idea not to read what I've written until several months have passed?

A: Because the first thing you will do is to edit it, critique it, change it to “make it better.” When we write as honestly as we can about what is happening in our lives, we are so close to it that we have little, if any perspective of ourselves in the midst. Perspective comes over time, and along with it, comes healing. One of the participants in the group shared that she allows herself to read what she wrote three months earlier if she has made an entry that day in her journal. Her practice is an excellent one.

Q: I'm having trouble journal writing because I'm used to producing a “product.” What can I do?

A: It begins with giving yourself permission to become self-caring and valuing yourself not for what you do but for who you are. Workaholics come to mind immediately in this behavior. It is only if they are working that they are worthwhile. This is one of the most harmful, destructive attitudes to live with, and it is a major obstacle to healing.

Q: No matter how hard I try, I can't seem to find the time to write in my journal. What can I do?

A: We are very pragmatic in our lives. We do what works. We do what we value. If we don't value something, truly value it, we avoid doing it. The moment you begin to prize and value the healing that comes from journal writing you will discover that you not only have the time but insist on its being in your schedule – no matter what other priorities you face. Discover if this is not true for you.

Q: How will I know if journal writing is helping me?

A. In the pudding is the proof! Your own journal will reveal the healing benefit you experience and this will be reflected in the way you live your life and write about it. It will not be a secret to you, for you will have ample evidence of new and different perspectives.

Q: Can you tell me who will publish my journal?

A: The journal you are writing each day is not for publication but for healing. Your decision to publish is an entirely different project for you than your daily effort to initiate the healing process. The material in your journal can be reworked into many different forms, and it is possible that you may decide to undertake the work that will translate your entries into a presentation for an audience. Permit yourself the healing that only you can do for yourself before entering the arena of publication.