



Introduction

*It's about truth and discovery.
It's about freedom and valuing yourself.*

Life is all of these: truth, discovery, freedom, you. Writing is the way to connect the dots.

A definitive series of events brought me to the point of writing this book:

- Depression, the depths of which brought me to write a suicide letter (fortunately never delivered) to my children in 2000.
- A failed relationship that hit me at a core level in 2002; taking me from blissful to broken.
- In 2003, a movie, *Shawshank Redemption*, in which the lead character said, “It comes down to a simple choice, get busy livin’ or get busy dyin’.”

I decided to get busy livin’. I took time to reflect upon my life and look at the lessons God had given me. I knew that these lessons were not simply for me. He trained me up to write from the time I was a little girl. Since my late teens, I engaged in a practice of journaling. The more I wrote, the better I got. The more I read, the better I got. The more I

studied the movies I watched, the better I got. And the better I got, the more I noticed that I was writing my life. In those notes were the seeds for one heck of a story. It was time for me to share.

Everyone has a tale to tell. I encourage you to put yours down in print. I am an advocate of life story writing for those who come after us; but more and more, I think we should write our stories for ourselves. In my experience, many of us don't give ourselves the credit we deserve, but if we reflect upon our lives, we will know that we deserve the credit we've been longing for. In the pages we write are great doses of wisdom, wisdom we know down to our toes, wisdom we can tap into that will mean more than any accolades we receive—God-given wisdom.

You may call the source of this wisdom God, Universal Intelligence, Divine Creator, Source Energy, Allah, Buddha, or one of the many other terms used around the world. My point is this: just as I found something sacred deep inside me, you can, too.

***All that I have done before
has brought me to where I am now.***

It's been a long time since stringing words together on the page has been difficult for me. There was a time when, in my journals, I was so devoid of congruent thought that the best I could do was a laundry list of what I had done in a day. It was a starting place. No, it was actually a middle place, since I had put words on the page from a very young age. But the laundry list was a place from which I grew, and now I cannot seem to think without my hands on a keyboard, or without a pen or pencil in my hand. This book has been inspired from a source both outside of me, and inside of me. I am simply the conduit through which it flows. You are the beneficiary.

The questions and the stories that follow reflect my own growth over a period of two years. Your writing, too, will reflect your growth over a period of time. You may read the chapters in any order you wish. I trust you will find exactly what you need at any given point in time.



The Three Rs: Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rtication

You say these aren't the three Rs you grew up with. Way back when, reading, writing, and arithmetic were considered the basics of life. I propose that my three Rs—reading, 'riting, and 'rtication—are the basics of writing.

Anyone can write. You don't believe me? If you can talk, you can write. I know, I know, the experts will tell you it's, oh, so difficult. But we all have stories. In fact, when I sit down with my clients, often the first thing they say is, "But I can't write." Then they proceed to tell me all about their lives. Do you suppose if they just put that stream of words coming out of their mouths down on paper they would find they've created a book—or at least their life stories? This is how I created *Write from the Inside*. One word at a time, then one sentence, then paragraph, and page after page.

I was never a great student of the English language in school. In fact, because I moved so often as a military dependent, I missed that favorite of most of my peers: diagramming sentences! Well, that's what editors are for, isn't it? They love manipulating the twenty-six letters of the alphabet that others have strung together, to make them sing, and make more sense than originally put forth. But I have a few secrets of my own that I'd like to share, since even though

I'm not a master of commas and semicolons, I have managed to put my thoughts forth in a fashion that folks enjoy.

The fundamental secrets are reading, writing, and speaking. It's all about osmosis. You probably think I'm crazy about now, but after a lifetime of learning this way, I can attest to the soundness of my theory.

It's important to read as much as you can. Reading is a practice that should be done every day. Some read the newspaper, or used to. Now you can find that information online. But it's important to let the eyes do the walking. Although listening to TV or radio will give you the same information, the act of seeing the letters, words, and punctuation in black and white, provides the classroom of osmosis from which you will learn the basics of good writing.

My love affair with the written word began while adventuring with Nancy Drew. I couldn't put these books down. In fact, I think it's the only thing my parents ever disagreed on—how late I should be allowed to stay up at night reading. Dad would say, "It's almost midnight, she needs to get her sleep." Mom would say, "You can't make a child be tired." Ever since then, I've found something to read. As I often told my children, "If you don't want to have to depend on others to learn how to do things, learn to read." I have learned many of the things I know simply by opening a book.

I read something every day. Most often I have a book in my hand, but newspapers and magazines are also good sources of education. I read a minimum of one book every three weeks in order to write a book review for my ezine, *Write from the Inside*, which continues to be published on that interval. A stack of books lie handy for regular reading at my bedside and in my living room.

I find myself subconsciously studying the flow in everything I read. My brain registers the order of the words and the punctuation. I follow scene descriptions, dialogue between characters, and plot. It all happens without realizing it. But after years of reading, I know it *is* happening.

Writing is the act of putting that osmosis learning into practice. It's not important to write formal pieces that will be submitted for publication, graded by a teacher, or judged for a contest. It *is* important to put the words down on paper. A daily practice of journaling is a form of school itself, and it has many other benefits. Your journal will give you a point of reference for what you did when, and also how far you've come in your journey of personal growth. In addition, you will find that over a period of months and years, your writing will improve simply by the doing.

Today, when I read what I wrote in college, I think, *How boring! No one would take the time to read this!* But now, not only do people read what I've written month after month, but when I look at some of my current pieces, I think, *Wow, that's really good stuff!* No, I'm not being immodest here. Matter of fact, it's with great humility that I find myself surprised. My intent is to share my own experiences in order to give you permission to journey into adventures of your own, and to be pleasantly surprised, just as I have been.

Lastly, talk, talk, talk. Tell your stories to your kids, your family, your friends. You will find the more you tell your stories, the more refined they will become, and the better able you will be to write them down concisely and clearly.

You can take this one more step and participate in a local Toastmasters club. I find that preparing to speak to a group helps me understand many things. I get clarity on what I really believe. I learn to express the essence of my message with greater impact. I master language in a different way.

So, you see, it's all in the practice. Some need to take a class, but I maintain that all you have to do is *do*. Set aside time every day, or several days a week, to read, to write, and to articulate.

Read, write, speak—every day.



Discover the Value

This book is not a how-to book in the traditional sense. It's a show-and-tell book. The triggers in the following pages are designed to help kindle your memories, give you tips on getting started, help you keep going, and make you realize the incredible value of documenting your life.

Some of the reasons I encourage you to do this work are to:

- Heal the past
- Leave a legacy
- Learn what you hold dear
- Pass on your values to family members
- Honor and acknowledge the life you've lived

Take the first step. Read this book. Let the triggers and exercises inspire and motivate you to pick up your pen and write down your life. Let my stories show you how.

I realized not too long ago that as I read books voraciously, I was always looking for myself in another's work. Suddenly I realized that although I might find similarities between my life and the characters described, I would never find my own story there. I have begun to write my own stories and am gratified to know that my children will know me on the page and not have to guess who their mom was. They will also be able to pass my life on to generations to come.

I believe that every person should have a book about his or her life and I encourage my friends, colleagues, and clients to get it down in whatever form they choose. Just get it down. Your friends and family will marvel at the things they didn't know about you. You may even learn who you

really are. In the process, you will gain perspective and may even change your point of view from victim to victor, as one of my clients did. As Kris wrote her mother's story, she found that although *she* had viewed her mother as a victim, in truth her mother was quite courageous in facing the challenges of her life. This was a revelation for Kris.



Mining the Gold

As a young girl, I was often told, “You take things too personally. You wear your heart on your sleeve.” I was often criticized for being slow, for not finishing things in the time allotted, and for talking too much. I spent years trying to conform to the mold, to fit in, to be liked for what they wanted me to be.

I sold myself short, never quite using the talent God gave me. One day, I woke up. I had an “aha” moment. The light bulb went on. If I like to talk, why not talk. If I like to take my time and do quality work, why not do that. If I am sensitive and emotional, why not find what sparks my passion and walk that path, instead of doing things that do not suit me.

At 45, in the year 2000, I came to believe that some of the characteristics others tried to squelch were actually my greatest assets. So, now I write stories with heart, I speak publicly about the importance of writing life stories and leaving a legacy, and I take my time creating impeccably beautiful softcover, handbound books. These are my signatures—something no one else can claim in quite the same way.

Mine your gold, find your signature, and leave it for those who will care when you're gone.

—*Lissa A. Forbes*