

## Journaling during cult recovery

Five tips for how this free and freeing practice can support and heal you

By Alexandra Amor

The first thing I did on day one of my journey of cult recovery was pick up my journal and start writing. I haven't stopped yet.

Though I didn't know it at the time, writing would be one of my greatest allies and fondest friends during the most intense years of recovering from the cult I had belonged to for a decade. I had been a fairly faithful journaler for many years, but writing became a daily practice as I whacked my way through the tangled, dangerous, often confusing jungle of cult recovery.

Here are my top five tips for using writing to aid your healing:

1. **Acquire the cheapest journal you can find.** Writing about a topic as serious as your cult recovery can seem like a weighty and important task (it is) and we might be tempted then to purchase a weighty and important journal. However, more often than not we can end up feeling intimidated by the beauty of a leather-bound or other type of fancy journal. We might feel our messy feelings and unformed thoughts are not worthy of such a beautiful journal. (I've seen this actually happen to people. I call it Paralysis By Beautiful Journal.) And what that means is that nothing gets written in it. So I say, go cheap. I personally use \$4.99 spiral bound notebooks that I buy at office supply stores. They don't intimidate me at all and I can be as messy and incoherent as I need to be and the journal isn't offended or demeaned in any way. (Cheap pens work well too – I never have to care if I lose them.)
2. **Write longhand.** By talking about buying a notebook, you might think that I'm implying that your journaling should be done with a pen. That is true. There is something about the connection between mind/heart, brain and paper that, I believe, allows us to express our thoughts and feelings more fully. Natalie Goldberg (author of *Writing Down the Bones*) first introduced me to this idea and I have come to agree with her. However, having said that, if you absolutely, positively can't stand writing with a pen and paper, then by all means use whatever computerized method works for you. Writing in any way is better than not writing at all.
3. **Develop a daily practice.** When we do something daily, like showering or brushing our teeth, it becomes second-nature to us. It becomes something necessary for our well-being. I believe this applies to writing. Writing occasionally is better than not writing at all, but developing a daily practice means that expressing your thoughts and feelings in this way will become part of who you are. And I think that's healthy. Find a time of day that suits you best; you are the best judge of when 20 or 30 minutes of journaling would best fit into your schedule. If you choose a time that works for you, you're more likely to do it frequently.

4. **Create sacred space.** This is important work you're doing, writing about your cult experience and all the attendant thoughts and feelings. Honour yourself and the courage that you are showing by writing in a space that honours you. Make sure that you cannot be interrupted. Choose a place that is relatively quiet. Do what you need to do to feel comfortable (light a candle, turn off the radio, turn off the phone). You are nurturing yourself by writing so I encourage you to treat this time with the respect you deserve.
5. **Remember, this writing is all about you.** I encourage you to consider your journal a private space that no one but you enters. No one else will read this writing and no one is allowed to comment on it. It is not for display or publication, it is for healing. Just as you probably wouldn't allow friends or family members to observe a therapy session, you should feel no obligation to ever share this writing with anyone. Keeping this suggestion in mind will hopefully allow you to be as petty and sad and angry and vitriolic as you need to be. That's what journaling is for. It's for you and your feelings. (More about this in my article called "Why Journaling Works for Cult Survivors".)

Bonus Tip: I couldn't live without my lap desk. You know what a lap desk is, right? A piece of wood or plastic adhered to a pillow or some other soft foundation, so that you can set it on your lap and then set your cheap journal on top. As far as I'm concerned lap desks are the best invention since shoes. They enable us to journal on the couch or on a bed, with our feet up in divine comfort. I can no longer imagine writing while sitting at an actual desk. I'm so attached to my lap desk that I can hardly bear to travel because I have to leave it behind at home (it's too bulky to travel with). The next greatest invention would be a collapsible, travel-friendly lap desk...

Cult recovery is a lonely business and unfortunately it requires a tremendous amount of effort. My hope is that by developing a daily journaling practice you'll find some comfort and some release for your feelings and therefore some healing.

Take care of yourself,  
Alexandra

Alexandra Amor is a cult survivor and the author of the memoir *Cult, A Love Story*. She teaches other cult survivors to use writing to aid their healing and recovery. Download free copies of all her articles about writing and healing, and join the discussion about cult recovery, at [www.cultalovestory.com](http://www.cultalovestory.com).