

*Life's
Companion*

Christina Baldwin

Journal Writing as a Spiritual Practice



Christina Baldwin

Bantam Books



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A Bantam Book

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO JOY

*"Weeping may tarry for a night,
but joy cometh with the morning."*

Psalm 30:5

*May we write through the night
until writing brings us light.*

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Preface

In 1977, I wrote a book called *One to One: Self-Understanding Through Journal Writing*. It was one of the first books published that named the practice of journal writing as a significant contributor to personal growth, psychological awareness, and life review. It remained in print for nearly thirty years. At that time, I was a naive young writer without any understanding that writing a book is like having a child—you never stop raising it, supporting it, discovering the complex and true nature of your relationship as it matures. *One to One* was a foundational book that helped a generation begin writing their lives. In the next ten years, hundreds of thousands of people dis-

covered the power of journal writing. I became a teacher of journal writing, conference presenter, and co-author of three additional books.

Between 1988 and 1990, I wrote *Life's Companion*. I wanted to extend my own practice of journal writing to explore the connection between personal and spiritual growth. By this time, the title of this book was true for me, and for millions of very private writers—our journals were our life companions. The journal in which I write companions me nearly everywhere, even on busy trips when the only time I take to write is on the plane. The volumes of journals I've already filled have two places in my house: a dozen or so notebooks representing the past few years reside on the bottom row of my corner bookshelf, along with other frequently referenced texts, and the rest of the collection is packed in storage. Sometimes on a Saturday afternoon when I am digging in the back of the master bedroom closet for something, I find and open the archived boxes of my journals.

There I rediscover the original black three-ring binder from 1960, filled with smudged pencil and ink words bleeding through pages of cheap school paper that were never intended to serve as an archive. There are dozens of uniform brown binders holding one volume after another from the years I traveled with a loose-leaf five-by-eight-inch notebook that I'd fill and empty, fill and empty. Influenced by the poetic types in my classes, I switched to a bound notebook format in the early 1980s, trusting myself to carry the whole volume with me and not lose it. The paper quality is better, and so is the ink and so is my handwriting. I have never yet lost a volume.

Sporadic but consistent, constantly evolving in content and theme, ranging in focus from personal healing to spiritual questioning to world issues, the journals record nearly fifty years of my life. Every person who's ever been important to me is mentioned in these pages; captured moments of daily life commingle with references to larger events in a fountain-penned stream of consciousness. I never reread them in any kind of entirety, though I search through them to understand the evolving articulation of my life's major themes. Sitting on the carpet, leaning against the doorjamb of the closet with evidence of my longtime writing practice scattered around me, I

revisit various eras of my life as the pages fall open. I am often surprised at what I find—surprised that in reading my own thoughts, I can see clearly that despite time and circumstances, the real me, the essence of my spirit, has remained unchanged. There is a core to the self. I offer myself to experience, I make choices, life confronts me with unexpected twists and turns, yet there is something in the writing voice of the teenager, in that of the thirty-year-old, and in that of me now that is familiar—is undeniably “me.”

Millions of journal writers are joined in this private exploration of the self—the source of our stories. Millions of people are joined in the knowledge that writing brings insight and calm in the same way that prayer, meditation, or a long walk in the woods does. They have discovered that writing allows the racing mind to move at the pace of pen and paper or the pace of typing on the waiting screen—that journal writing *is* a spiritual practice.

Over the decades, as I have remained dedicated to my personal writing and become an advocate of the journal-writing movement, I have come to see that we are participating in a renaissance of the personal story such as has never before occurred in history. We are claiming our lives, and even if we never read a word of what we've written to anyone else, the act of writing organizes our experiences into the stories we do share. We are profoundly different because we are writers. We are holding on to something that has sustained humanity since the beginning of time: our stories. It is all we have. Really. We see that we always were who we have become, and we are always becoming who we always were.

This new edition is an invitation to enter a great journey with me—perhaps for the first time, or perhaps again to pick up the narrative thread. Come into these pages, with their new clothes and old traditions. Keep writing. We are on our way somewhere so mysterious. We are on the journey home.

Blessings,
Christina Baldwin