

BOOK REVIEW

Three books that complement our changing world

Writing for bliss: a seven-step plan for telling your story and transforming your life, by Diana Raab, Ann Arbor, MI, Loving Healing Press, 2017, 215 pp., \$21.95, ISBN: 1615993231.

The book of calm: clarity, compassion, and choice in a turbulent world, by Nancy G. Shapiro, Berkeley, CA, She Writes Press, 2017, 220 pp., \$16.95, ISBN: 9781631522482.

Embracing the sign: a journey of faith, science, and experience, by Marion Goldstein, St. Paul, MN, Polaris Publications, 2017, 224 pp., \$16.00, ISBN: 9781682010846.

The theme of the upcoming NAPT Conference, "Poetry Therapy in a Changing World: Pathways to Growth, Healing, and Social Justice," reflects a world that has rocked our inner sense of who we are and what we believe. Each of these three books I have recently read and highly recommend suggests a different pathway to help us find our equilibrium. Coincidentally, each author was propelled to write their book after the death of a loved one. Through writing, listening to others, rigorous reflection, and referencing respected authors, they discovered new meaning and perspective for their lives and a way to proceed into the unknown. Story is a uniting force, and a fierce desire to not be undone by what lay ahead. Each book concludes with an impressive bibliography filled with resources for further inspiration.

For award-winning author Diana Raab, "writing is like breathing," as expressed by one of her favorite poets, Pablo Neruda. Raab is the author of four memoirs, five books of poetry, and hundreds of articles, and is the editor of two anthologies. She brings experience as a workshop leader, teacher, and blogger for *Psychology Today*, *PsychAlive*, and *The Huffington Post*. Raab received her MFA in nonfiction writing from Spalding University and her PhD in Transpersonal Psychology from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. The event that began her long writing career was the suicide of her beloved grandmother when she was ten years old. The grandmother, a journal keeper, lived with the family, who cared for her. It is she who taught Raab how to type her short stories on an old Remington typewriter. Her mother, an English teacher, gave her a red leather journal where she could write all her feelings. Later her mother gifted the author with the grandmother's typed journal, which helped Raab understand her grandmother's life as an orphan in Poland during and after World War I. From this turning point in her life, Raab wrote her first memoir as an MFA thesis: *Regina's Closet: Finding My Grandmother's Secret Journal*. Four decades after her grandmother's death, Raab received her first cancer diagnosis, which resulted in the memoir *Healing with Words: A Writer's Cancer Journey*.

Writing for Bliss: A seven-step plan for telling your story and transforming your life, Raab's carefully researched latest book, is as much the story of Raab's healing and transformation over decades as it is a process to help others tell their story. Through seven steps, she guides others who have had similar losses to move from the inner rumblings of the stalled mind to the written page by "digging deeper" into their experience "and hearing the voice of your true, authentic self, while listening to the messages of your heart rather than suppressing them."

Whether the writer is a beginner or someone who has written stories, poems, narratives, or memoirs their whole lives, they will be rewarded with Raab's openness about herself, inspired by her courage to heal within each step, as well as by reading other's stories and experiences. She introduces and quotes many writers along the way, and offers prompts at the end of each chapter.

The steps Raab outlines are: Preparing to write, Cultivating self-awareness, Speaking your truth, Examining your life, Finding your form, Unleashing with poetry, and Sharing your writing. Of particular interest to those working in the field of poetry/bibliotherapy is the attention Raab gives to the difference of poetry for itself and the power of poetry for healing, particularly in working with metaphor, which helps clients explore and reveal "deepest sentiments," quoting Geri Giebel Chavis, author of several books on poetry/bibliotherapy and current president of NAPT.

What stands out to me is that Raab is absolutely serious about *bliss*. From her many traumas, each step of the way, she rises ecstatic for how she discovers her inner power to transcend what life has placed in her way. In her introductory chapter titled "Writing for Change," she describes bliss as "learning what brings you joy," often connected with your calling, which helps us "live our life to the fullest." *Writing for Bliss* feels something like walking a labyrinth, a meditation about all phases of writing and at the center, if you do only some of the prompts, you may find yourself quoting Robert Frost, along with Raab, that you took a road "less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." A prompt she gives titled "Poetry as Pathfinder," at the conclusion of Step Six, Unleashing with poetry, reads:

Consider your life as a train ride. Write a poem about your personal journey. Write about when you stayed on the train and when you took a risk and got off at an unopened stop and what happened ... Some paths are longer, some scarier, some more tenuous than others.

May you find joy stepping through the pages of this book, writing more easily and exploring your authentic voice.