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# *Transformed* by Writing

By Diana Raab

I wish I had known how brave I actually was on the day my grandmother committed suicide. I was ten years old when she overdosed on sleeping pills in my childhood home. Like any life-changing event, we sometimes don't realize their impact until many years later.

At the time, my mother, who had been an English major in college, helped me with the traumatic event by buying me a Kahlil Gibran journal.

"Think of this journal as your confidant and friend. It will help you deal with losing her," she said.

Since then, I've used writing as a way to heal and transform my life. In addition to writing in a journal, I've used letter writing, poetry and essays as other means of expression and dealing with during difficult times.

Many years later, after my grandmother died, I found her retrospective journal in her closet. In that journal she wrote about what it was like being an orphan in World War I and losing both her parents and emigrating with her sister from Poland to Austria. Reading her journal, reflecting on my own grandmother's life, led me on a path of discovery and transformation as I tried to understand why she had taken her life at the age of 61. Studying my grandmother's life helped me understand, grow, and become empowered by her experience, and take on the role of a woman warrior. I learned from her how to become empowered by experiences, and also help others become empowered by theirs. Thus, my grandmother left me with a huge gift.

After my grandmother died, and as the only daughter of two hardworking immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s, I was left to my own devices, in the sense that I was often left home alone to entertain myself; journaling was a huge part of my life.

Writing can help reclaim one's voice after it has been taken away or silenced by difficult circumstances or traumas. Finding one's voice as a way toward healing can lead to huge leaps in transformation.

It took me more than 45 years to write about the trauma of finding my grandmother after her suicide. The distance provided the perspective I needed to understand why she chose to depart from this life in such a way, but one thing I do know is that I possessed a lot more courage back then than I was aware of at the time.

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