



FROM TOP: GETTY IMAGES; ROB HESS

By ELLEN BYRON

Keeping a journal can be good for us, but does it matter what we write? Lara Zielin, an author and life coach, believes it does. Ms. Zielin, who is 45 years old and based in Ypsilanti, Mich., advises her clients to follow a method of journaling she calls “Author Your Life,” where people think about themselves as characters in a story of their making. This approach can help the hesitant begin writing and break the rut that seasoned journal writers can experience when they revisit the same things over and over, she says.

“Journaling can be an excavation if you let it, it’s getting to the root of the root of what’s really going on with you and what is really the problem,” Ms. Zielin says.

Below, she describes the benefits of writing about yourself in the third person and how 10 minutes a day of journaling can be enough. Edited excerpts:

Why and how should someone start journaling?

Journaling is really, really good for us. It’s a tool for self-reflection and there are many studies that show it is good for our physical and mental health. I teach my own method but there’s no wrong way to journal. What makes journaling most effective is this idea of welcoming stillness and reflection. Where we get stuck is that in our culture everything is screaming at us to not stop.

Why do some of us write a page in a journal and then abandon it? Difficulty with stillness is probably the primary reason. Also, it is really hard to prioritize ourselves. If we spend time thinking about ourselves, our own wants and what will make us happy, it feels really selfish. We’re not really conditioned to ask “What is it that I really want out of this life?”



Lara Zielin tells clients to ‘Say yes to being the hero in your story.’

Why did you develop a method of journaling?

I was a fiction writer and for so long I thought about what my characters wanted and what would make them happy. Then I thought, “Wait a minute, why am I spending all this time on what my characters want? I’m really unhappy, what will make me happy?” I started writing about myself like a character.

How does it work?

You make yourself the hero in a story of your own making and write about the life that you want to have. We’ve all heard the adage, “Change your story, change your life.” Author Your Life is a way to do that where you write about the life you want to have as if it’s already occurring.

There are five rules for how you do that. I call it the HAPPE method. It starts with H, which is handwriting. It slows down your brain. Many of us have heard that study where kids who type notes on a laptop in class retain less information than the kids writing by hand. It connects a motor skill to a thought, which is more likely to make it stick.

The A is for writing “as if” what we want to have happen is happening now. If I want a beach house in Hawaii, I’m not writing, “I hope one day I’ll have a beach house in Hawaii.” I’m writing “Lara sits on the beach and smells the flowers and feels the wind in her face.”

The first P is for writing in the third person. It gives us a bit of perspective and distance. For example, if I say “I’m going to try to run three days this week,” that voice might say “I’m not sure you can.” But if I have that bit of cognitive distance with “Lara runs three days this week,” my brain is more likely to believe it.

The next P is that we want to keep it positive. This is another cognitive trick. If I say “Lara doesn’t eat all the Oreos,” all my brain hears is “Lara eats all the Oreos.” Instead, you can say “Lara

fuels herself with healthy foods.”

I spell HAPPE with an E, which stands for emotions. After we’re done writing, one of the best things we can do is close our notebook and begin to embody the emotions that we just wrote about. It closes the distance between all the things you want to be true and your actual presence. Our minds are so powerful that we can begin to experience that now, whatever it is. It could be a feeling of peace about your job or calm during the pandemic. You just close your eyes and begin to feel those emotions and the power of that story as if it’s happening now. If you never get that beach house, you still have experienced it in some way.

Why does that help?

One of the most fundamentally powerful things is to write a story about when you love yourself and feel good about yourself. Then when those self-sabotaging behaviors or mean thoughts that we all have about ourselves start, the tension is there on the page—that’s not my story, that’s not what I’m trying to experience. It’s a tool for awareness and hopefully a tool for change.

Why do journaling ruts happen?

People get stuck or write one page and then walk away because they’re just revisiting pain, reliving a crappy situation with no way to

change it. By giving yourself permission to bring your imagination into the journaling process and allowing yourself the opportunity to say what a great day looks like or a

great job looks like, it brings in new thoughts that are fresh and ushers in hope.

Any suggestions on what to write about first?

Put your hero, who is you, into

an ideal day. What is happening? I encourage people to go deeper into what are they tasting, smelling, all of the senses. Most importantly, what are they feeling?

It’s not about recording what happened that day?

Right, I’m journaling in the third person, in the future. But if it feels good to create a record of your day, do it. Find what works for you. There is no wrong way to journal.

Any tips for people who struggle to find time to journal?

I feel for people who don’t have an hour, but you might have 10 minutes. You can make enormous progress in 10 minutes with this process. I encourage people who feel that they don’t have 10 minutes to stop and ask “Do you really want this life where you don’t have 10 minutes?” If you’re a character, and this is a story, how happy is this character, what messages are you listening to if you don’t even have 10 minutes?

FUTURE OF HEELS IS WOBBLY—FOR NOW

By RAY A. SMITH

Najay Roache, a 34-year-old who works in government affairs in New York City, recently went to her closet to try on her Vince Camuto pumps with four-inch heels for the first time in a year.

“I was doing like a saunter step, trying to be cute, and I fell forward,” she says. “It was a huge, messy dramatic fall.”

As vaccines roll out and society emerges from quarantines, many women contemplating returning to offices, restaurants and social events are taking a new look at their long-unused high-heeled shoes. Some are dreading or altogether rejecting the idea of going back to pumps after months in house shoes, sneakers and flats. Others can’t wait to get dressed up again and wear their favorite heels, discomfort be damned.

Sales of high-heeled shoes fell 45% in 2020, according to market researcher NPD Group, as women had nowhere to wear them. Beth Goldstein, the firm’s industry analyst for accessories and footwear, predicts sales will rise this year, but only modestly, as more women, feeling liberated from the tyranny of heels, stick with more comfortable footwear.

Many women had already been moving away from heels pre-Covid with the growing casual-fashion

trend. The pandemic accelerated that shift. Brands famous for stilettos and pumps, such as Christian Louboutin and Stuart Weitzman, have been promoting more flats, loafers, sandals and sneakers on their Instagram accounts.

Men, too, are looking at going back to work shoes, but men’s dress footwear has generally been many steps ahead of women’s in comfort and cushioning technology.

The forced pause on dressing up put a spotlight on women’s complicated relationship with heels and other restrictive clothing. Some have been grateful for the respite from high heels yet also miss them, says Marjorie Jolles, a professor of women’s and gender studies at Roosevelt University. “Women feel enabled by heels,” she says, referring to the sense of empowerment, polish and confidence some women say heels provide.

But for some, the pandemic may mark the end of wearing high heels. In March, on her way to meet a friend at a local winery in Columbus, Ohio, Joia Mercedes almost immediately began regretting her decision to wear a pair of new high heels. It marked the first time Ms. Mercedes, a flight attendant, had worn heels since January 2020. “My ankles were like, ‘No, this isn’t the life for me anymore,’” she says.

During the pandemic, Ms. Mercedes’s many pairs of heels sat in her garage as she gravitated to flip



Many women are taking a new look at their long-unused high-heeled shoes.

flops, sandals and boots. Quarantining and the recent incident have shown her she can live without heels, she says. “I’m definitely comfort over cute right now. I think I’ll be wearing some flats for the rest of 2021.”

Others, like Sarah Hancotte, a 42-year-old information-technology project manager in the Phoenix area, won’t give up on heels but she does plan to wear them less often. After recently walking in a parking lot in heels for the first time since the pandemic began—likening it to “navigating an ‘American Ninja Warrior’ course”—she says she has decided

her plan is to “be more intentional” in choosing outfits that pair well with flats, so she doesn’t need to wear heels all the time.

The first walk in heels after a year has prompted other women to consider re-entering slowly before stepping up to higher styles. Meghan Moore, a 45-year-old marketing executive in Philadelphia, wore a pair of four-inch heels in December for the first time since lockdowns and compared her look on the cobblestone streets to “walking like a baby giraffe.” She held on to her husband to keep from falling. Her plan is to work her way up, “starting with flats

then go to a kitten heel and then higher. It’s going to be like training wheels for stilettos.”

Podiatrists have been advising those patients who want to return to high heels to take baby steps, starting with lower styles then graduating or doing foot-muscle exercises to brace themselves for venturing out in heels again. “Some of the exercises will include writing the letters of the alphabet with your toes, or maybe picking up a towel with your toes,” says New York-based podiatrist Suzanne Levine. She also recommends working on glutes and abdominal muscles to prepare for heels and help improve balance.

Though sales of high heels overall fell in 2020, younger women in particular kept buying them in anticipation of the days when they could dress up again, says Alexis DeSalva Kahler, senior analyst of retail and e-commerce at market researcher Mintel. A January 2021 Mintel survey of 2,000 adults found that 35% of women ages 18 to 34 made online purchases of dress shoes, including heels, in the last 12 months, compared with less than 25% for women age 35 and above.

Amanda Greene is one of those shoppers. The 31-year-old middle-school band teacher in Columbia, S.C., bought six pairs of heels online while quarantining, and wore one pair in late March when she attended a funeral outdoors. It was her first time in heels in a year, and for a couple of days after, her calves hurt. “I have to figure out what’s the best means of getting myself used to wearing them because I have too many pairs to just stop wearing them altogether,” she says.

EDWARD BERTHELOT/GETTY IMAGES